

ALL ABOUT PETS



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ALL ABOUT PETS



Fr.

“HAVE YOU BREAKFASTED, JAMES?”

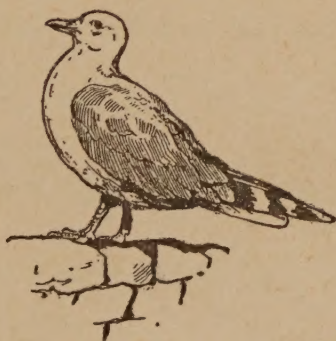
ALL ABOUT PETS

TOLD IN STORIES

By
LILIAN GASK

AUTHOR OF
"ALL ABOUT ANIMALS" "TRUE STORIES ABOUT DOGS"
"THE HUNDRED BEST ANIMALS" "BABES OF THE WILD" ETC.

With Four Illustrations in Colour



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I SHOULD like to acknowledge, with very sincere thanks, the courtesy and kindness of Captain Fairholme, Chief Secretary of the R.S.P.C.A., not only in looking through my proofs, but in placing his library at my disposal. The Records of the Society have been freely made use of in discussing the treatment of various pets, and in citing anecdotes concerning these.

L. G.

ALL ABOUT PETS

CHAPTER ONE

DANDY

WHEN Hilda and Geoffrey came in from school one very cold winter's day, a hamper was standing just inside the hall. The carrier had brought it from Great Thorpe Station, and the top of it was still powdered with snow, which had not yet had time to melt.

"From Aunt Carrie!" said Hilda, as she saw the label. "Open it quick, Geoff! I wish it were my birthday too."

"You wouldn't like one so close to Christmas," Geoff replied, as he searched in his pockets for his knife. "Aunt Carrie's about the only person who sends presents both times. I guess it's apples."

"Or pears," said Hilda. "Last year it was a cake. And—don't you remember?—it was 'sad' in the middle, and you had to stay away from school next day!"

"Good luck!" cried Geoffrey, trying another pocket. The knife wasn't there either—it was in Hilda's ribbon drawer—and while he felt for it among half a dozen marbles, several fine 'conkers,' two slate-pencils, and some string, the lid of the hamper went *bump!* from inside.

"It's alive!" exclaimed Hilda, and ran off to fetch the knife. She came back with it, breathless, and the cord was cut. The lid immediately burst open.

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"*Woof! Woof!*" barked a very indignant voice. "What a time you've been setting me free!"

And out of the hamper stepped a little white dog, with bright dark eyes set deep in his head, and beautifully straight white legs. "I'm DANDY" was deeply engraved on his collar, with Geoff's name and address in small letters underneath. He stood still for a moment to stretch himself. He'd been shut up for hours and hours.

"Why, his feet are almost the same shape as Tibby's!" remarked Hilda. And they were, for Dandy's mother was a champion, and you had only to look at him to see that he was a well-bred dog. His dense short coat was as close as velvet, and when he yawned, as he did when Hilda called him 'lovely,' he showed a mouthful of gleaming teeth as level as a row of pearls.

He did not wait to be inspected long. In a minute or two he was trotting round to see what there was to be seen.

Geoff let him explore the garden first, but that only took him a very short time. He couldn't find a single cat.

"H'm—decent hall," he said to himself as he dived behind the tall grandfather's clock, and sniffed at a hole in the old oak wainscoting. Then he rushed upstairs, with the children after him, and hearing sounds from behind a door, tumbled joyously into the nursery. The baby was lying on a rug before the fire. Before Nurse could stop him he had rolled her over and was licking her rosy face.

Nurse was very indignant, but the baby liked it. Clutching at his ears with her fat pink fingers, she tugged at them and said "*Goo!*" Dandy didn't even wriggle, and his bit of a tail wagged as hard as ever it would go.

"He is fond of children," said Mother, quite pleased. "Geoff, give him some supper. He must be hungry. Be off with your

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master, Dandy. There! Good doggie! No—you mustn't eat my shoes. They don't taste as nice as they look."

Geoffrey brought him a bowl of well-boiled rice with some stale brown bread soaked in a little gravy, which Cook said was good for young dogs. By way of dessert she gave him a bone—a big one that he could gnaw.

"Do him harm? Not a bit of it, Master Geoff," she said when he looked at it doubtfully. "If 'twas chicken bones, now, or suchlike, that would be different. They'd splinter and stick in his throat."

Dandy said "Thank you" by barking twice, and then made up for lost time. He licked his plate so clean that it shone, pushed it aside, and looked at Geoff as if waiting for something else.

"It is water he wants," said Mother, who always guessed things. And she gave Geoff an earthenware bowl for him which was always to be kept in the hall.

"You must see that it is filled with fresh water every day," she said. "He will have to look to you for everything, for he is yours, and if you keep a pet the least you can do is to take care of him and make him happy. You're his protector, you know."

Geoffrey blushed with pleasure. He felt very proud, for Tom Robinson was two years older than he, and he hadn't got a dog yet.

"I'll be real good to you, old fellow," he whispered in Dandy's ear.

"I'll see to that," barked Dandy, and off he went. He fancied that he could smell a rat, and wanted to explore the cellars.

The next thing to decide was where he should sleep. Later on, said Mother, he might have a kennel, well raised off the ground by four blocks of wood to keep out the damp, with plenty of clean straw and a door at the side instead of at the end, so that when

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the wind was cold he could still find a snug corner. At present he was to sleep in the house, so she found a wooden box just big enough to give him room if he felt he would like to turn round, and Geoffrey carefully drew out the nails so that they might not hurt him. Then Hilda fetched a piece of felt that had been the best carpet in her doll's house. This was for him to lie on. With a piece of old rug to cover him, said Mother, he would be quite warm and comfortable.

That night, when all the household was asleep, a mournful sound came from the kitchen, where Dandy's box stood beside the fireplace. Dandy was homesick. He howled and howled till the baby woke and howled too. Every one but Nurse, who was trying to hush her, and Daddy, who said "That dog's going to be a nuisance!" hurried downstairs to quiet him.

Mother looked just sweet in a soft pink dressing-gown; Cook had a shawl tied round her head, and a yellow mackintosh over her shoulders; while Emma, the housemaid, had slipped on her cap and wrapped herself up in a quilt. Dandy stopped howling to stare at them, and listened politely enough when they said that he must "be a good dog and go to sleep"; but the moment they showed signs of leaving him to himself the dismal howls began again.

"Couldn't we have him in our room—just for once?" begged Geoffrey. And Hilda said "Please, *please!*" her blue eyes all soft and misty.

Mother shook her head. "It wouldn't do," she said. "If once Dandy gets his own way by howling, he'll never know when to stop."

Then Cook, who was a kind old soul, had one of her bright ideas.

"'Tis lonesome he is," she said pityingly. "If you'd give

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him that rag doll of yours, Miss Hilda, it would be company for him."

So the doll was brought. Dandy fixed his teeth in it and shook it violently, as if it were a rat. But this time when they left him, well covered up, he did not attempt to howl, and next morning Cook found him fast asleep with the rag doll between his fore-paws. He had gnawed off its head and one of its legs, but this was to show his love. For weeks to come he took it to bed with him, as Hilda had done when she was small.

It did not take him long to make himself at home—so much so, indeed, that nothing would suit him but to share the baby's silk-lined cot. In he crept the moment that Nurse turned her back, till at last she refused to have him in the nursery, though he barked and whined outside the door. All that day, while Geoff and Hilda were at school, he crept about sadly, his tail between his legs, and his eyes so full of trouble that Mother was sorry for him.

"If you'll stay on the rug, Nurse will let you in," she said, and Dandy understood. Since the cot was denied him, he would lie by the fire, and there he sprawled while Baby had her bath. When Nurse lifted her out, and she cried, he growled. The wee thing stopped crying—she was so surprised—and Dandy began to lick her toes, which made her crow with delight. When Geoff came in he merely wagged his tail, and did not attempt to stir.

Geoff felt neglected. It was quite all right that Dandy should be fond of Baby—he thought her a ripping little kid himself, though he wished she were not so bald. And Hilda, of course, must have a share in him, but still—

"I do want him to feel he b'longs to *me*!" he told Mother wistfully when she came to say good-night.

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"He soon will," she comforted. "I believe he really does already. To-morrow you must ask Jenkins how to feed him—he has kept dogs all his life."

Jenkins was full of information when Geoffrey sought him next morning in the greenhouse. The first thing he said was that "dog or no dog" he'd not have his rose-beds trampled upon, and when Geoffrey promised that on no account should Dandy be encouraged to hunt cats among them, he calmed down and grew quite chatty.

"A six-months-old puppy," he declared, "must have three meals a day; when he gets a bit older, two will be a' plenty. Puppy or dog biscuits, broken up small and moistened with a little gravy, will do him fine to start on; in the middle of the day he can have what's going, and then, or at night, you must give him a bit of meat—it's a dog's natural food, sir. Good plain suet pudding's the very thing for him, specially when he's a-growing. A morsel of well-cooked greens will do him good, and now and then a piece of well-cooked liver.

"Later on—say in three months or so—give him his biscuit dry; it'll help to keep his teeth clean, same as a bone to gnaw. How much food at a time? As much as he eats hearty. When he begins to turn his victuals over, then's the time to take his plate away. Don't give him salt—it's poison to a dog—and let him have plenty of clean, fresh water."

"Mother said that," nodded Geoffrey. "Now I want to know how to teach him to fetch and carry, and stay on guard, and come when I call him, and bring sticks from the water, and——"

"One question at a time, Master Geoff," grinned Jenkins, "and we'll get on all the faster. Well, whenever I starts to train a dog I first try to make him understand just exactly what I

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want him to do. No use getting cross wi' him if he doesn't do it at once, unless you want to confuse him and put him off.

“ Say you're going to teach him to follow and come to heel—and the sooner you do this the better—'tain't fair to a dog to let him be a nuisance, as he will be if he goes straying. If he doesn't come sharp to heel when you call him, take him out next time on a lead. Then try him again; he'll soon understand, and know what he's back on the lead for. Don't strike him unless he breaks away to chase sheep, or is always fighting other dogs; beating breaks a dog's spirit, and makes him good for naught. Once he's afraid of you, he'll take twice as long to learn. But 'twon't do no harm to touch him lightly on his flanks with a switch if he tries to race on in front when you've told him to go to heel.

“ When he does what you tell him at once, fuss him up a bit, and maybe give him a bit of biscuit. You'll have to be patient, sir, in training him, same as your mother is with you. And don't tire him out by trying to teach him to do too much at a time.

“ I taught my old Jingo to stay 'on guard' by putting a piece of stick on the ground and saying them two words over and over, very slowly, as I pointed it out to him. Then I moved off a bit, and when he followed me I put him back, and said 'On guard!' again. I did this a dozen times or more before he got it into his head that he wasn't to budge an inch. Then I gave him a titbit—a piece of cake; and the next time I said it he didn't budge an inch, but glued his eyes to that stick!

“ Never let Dandy have aught to do wi' stones. Many a dog has been choked with one, or got a sore mouth from a jagged edge, and all to oblige some feckless boy who didn't ought to be trusted with an animal. It makes me angry—same's when I saw Will Saunders fling his puppy into deep water. It's cruel to

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frighten a young dog so. He should have sent him after a stick at the shallow end of the stream, and have thrown it farther when he brought it back. This is the only right way.

"Tricks? Well, I don't hold much wi' these, Master Geoff. Makes a dog look silly, *I* think, to stand on his head or balance sugar on his nose! Dandy will beg quick enough if you show him; but if you keep rewarding him wi' dainty bits, he'll grow fat and die afore his time. Take him out wi' you whenever you can; dogs need a power of exercise to keep 'em well. And they're worth a bit of trouble. You couldn't have a better friend. Dandy'll stick to you through thick and thin, no matter what plight you're in, sir."

And Dandy did; but first I must tell you what happened when the new nurse came.

Old Nurse was not well, and went home for a holiday, so her niece came to fill her place. She seemed a nice girl, but Dandy didn't like her, and she certainly did not like Dandy. Whenever she could she shut the door upon him. She said dogs were "nasty brutes."

Now, though Geoffrey and he were the best of friends, and he had quite a weakness for Hilda, I think Dandy loved Baby Nell best of all; she was so small and sweet. And somehow he got it into his head that Martha, the new nurse, was not to be trusted. Nothing would induce him to let her go out with the perambulator without him; he stalked beside it with his tail in the air, and growled if she stopped to talk to a friend. This annoyed her so much that she tied him up to a leg of the table in the nursery. But Dandy broke his bonds and jumped out of the window, landing unhurt on the violet-bed that was the gardener's special pride. He caught Martha up in time to growl at her as she bade the postman good day.

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After this, whenever he heard the baby cry, as she always did when the new nurse put on her bonnet, he would slink out of doors and hide in the bushes. Then, just as Martha thought she had got off without him, he would turn up a few yards away. She said that he put out his tongue at her, but I don't think this can be true.

One day she took the baby for a ride, with Dandy, as usual, at her heels. Very soon the clouds began to blow up, but she did not notice the gathering storm till the sky was heavy with snow. The wind was bitter, so she took the big white shawl which was always at the foot of the perambulator and folded it over Nell, head and all.

"There, milady," she said as she put up the hood. "You'll come to no harm now." And Baby Nell, who was fast asleep, completely disappeared from view.

Then Martha began to hurry home, but Dandy had something to say to this. He had been tempted to explore a rabbit-hole, and when he caught up with the perambulator, uneasy at having let it out of his sight, it seemed to him that his beloved charge had somehow been spirited away.

"You don't go back without her!" he growled to Martha, who shook in her shoes, as she told Cook afterwards. "He looked *that* fierce," she explained.

And not a step dare that poor girl stir, though the snow came down in big heavy flakes, and the wind grew colder and colder. The baby, warm and dry beneath the shawl, slept on peacefully, while Martha shivered and wept. It was not until she woke with a little cry that Dandy found he had made a mistake, and allowed her to be taken home.

Fortunately old Nurse got well quite soon, for Dandy and Martha were now at daggers drawn, and she had not a good word

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to say for him. When she left he barked her cab down the road, and Tibbles, who had not liked her either, made friends with him on the spot. That day he defended two of her kittens from a strange yellow lurcher who pretended he thought them good to eat. Geoff bathed his wounds for him with carbolic lotion, and called him "a game little beggar."

As Jenkins, the gardener, said more than once, "the cold grew stronger as the days grew longer," and the ponds and streams were still locked with ice when the crocus hung out its yellow flag. One afternoon when Geoff had gone to school alone, because Hilda had a sore throat, Geoffrey found Dandy waiting for him outside the gates, ready to escort him home.

"Good old Dandy!" he said, and stooped to pat him. But Dandy, who was in a hurry to get back, ran on a little way ahead.

They had left the road and were in the lane when, turning his head to see if Geoff were coming, Dandy found that he wasn't to be seen.

Dandy was puzzled. What could Geoff be doing? Hunting rabbits? But he'd never done that before, and he wouldn't, surely, have gone into the wood without whistling for him to follow.

Dandy hesitated for a moment. He had had a long cold wait, and he knew that there were muffins for the nursery tea, and if he didn't hurry they might be gone. But no—he couldn't leave Geoff in the lurch, and back he went, barking "Where are you?"

There was no answer. This was queer. Down went his cute little nose to the ground, and back he ran until he came to the spot where Geoff's footsteps had stopped. They ended suddenly, as well they might; Geoff had lost his footing on the path and stumbled into a bank of snow. It covered him completely, for he had fainted with the pain of his broken foot; but Dandy knew

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he must be somewhere there, and flinging himself just above where the boy lay, he scratched away vigorously with his forepaws till he came upon a tweed-clad arm. He went to work more gently now, and was licking Geoff's face with his warm moist tongue when his master opened his eyes again.

Geoff could not walk, and Dandy would not leave him. They might have stayed there until both were frozen if it hadn't been for Dandy's howl. Louder and louder the mournful sound rang out through the darkness that frosty night. Somebody heard it on the road. "There's a dog in trouble," he said. Soon lanterns were brought, and Geoffrey was found, with Dandy crouching on his breast. . . .

"It's lucky you've such a big voice, old fellow," said Geoff, when his ankle had been set, and Dandy, unrebuked, lay on the bed beside him.

Mother said nothing—only smoothed Dandy's coat. And his tail wagged harder than ever.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BLACK QUEEN

MADAM CREE was knitting in the wide stone porch. Red and white roses grew up all round it, and rows of lilies ran on either side of the cobbled path from the gate. Brown velvet bees hummed over the lavender, and a big sleepy butterfly swayed to and fro on a top-heavy Mrs Sinkins pink.

"Knit two, purl *three*; knit two, purl *three*," Madam hummed over her knitting. A small sigh came from the lavender bush, and the faintest hint of a whine. Madam looked up to find she had visitors—a girl and a dog, both very hot, and not quite sure of their welcome.

"If you want a kitten," they had told Lallie in the village, "you had better go over to Cree's Farm. Madam's sure to have one, but she'll only gi'e it to you 'gin she's sure that you'll treat it proper."

"Mother wouldn't let me have it unless," said Lallie with dignity, and set out to find the farm. She had wanted a kitten ever since she could remember, but only to-day, and because it was her birthday, had mother consented to her keeping two pets. And she couldn't *possibly* give up Nikko.

"Now mind," said Mother, who was very busy unpacking huge piles of luggage, "if he chases it you must give it back. I won't have it made unhappy."

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"Nikko won't," Lallie promised. "He'll love it as much as I shall, and by the time we go back to town they will be quite used to each other."

And now he was close at Lallie's heels, wagging his tail engagingly. He was thirsty and tired, though not so tired as Lallie, and he had spied a saucer of milk in one corner of that wide stone porch.

"If you please," said Lallie, "I want a kitten. I'll be very kind to it, and so will Nikko. He *likes* cats when they don't scratch his nose."

"He likes my cat's milk, anyhow," smiled Madam Cree. "Come in and sit down. We'll talk about the kitten afterwards. You must be thirsty too."

She touched a bell at the side of the porch, and, almost like magic, a tea-tray appeared, carried by a smiling girl. It held brown bread and butter and honey and clotted cream, and crisp little ginger cakes.

"You can make the tea now, Maggie—I see Mr John," the old lady said; and down the path came a tall, thin figure that limped and was topped by a thin brown face. Close behind walked a very stately black cat and a frolicsome kitten.

"My grandson, Black Queen, and Dusky," said Madam Cree, with a wave of her hand towards them. "John, you must bring a chair for yourself, and Black Queen would like her basket. Little Dusky, come here. I shouldn't be surprised if this young lady were your new mistress."

Nikko pricked up his ears, but his eyes were occupied with those very nice-looking cakes, and not even when Dusky lay on Lallie's lap did he trouble to utter a protest. The cat took no notice of him at all, but stretched herself lazily in the patch of

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sunshine that fell by the young man's chair. She was purring loudly, for she was pleased. She had just caught two mice.

"Well, my beauty," said John, as he tickled her throat with one of his lean brown fingers, "your musical box is quite good for its size, but Moustache would have beaten you with his. Moustache," he told Lallie, handing her the scones, "was a cat that I met in Belgium. He came out of the dark when it poured cats and dogs, and jumped into our trench, purring like a band, as comfortable as you please. We'd been pretty well fed up with the wet and cold, and waiting for relief that didn't come, but somehow that purring made us feel different men as soon as he turned it on. It reminded us of home, and hot cakes, and boiling tea, and nice old ladies with lavender ribbons—now, what are you chuckling at, Grandmother?"

"Oh, do go on!" cried Lallie, for he had stopped, and she did want to hear the rest. "How long did he stay? And wasn't he frightened when he heard the sound of the guns?"

"Not the least little bit. I believe he just yawned. He'd sit and watch the shells as they burst against the sky as though he'd come out to see the fireworks. When he grew bored—those shells went on for hours—he'd stroll round to find something to eat. He was very partial to bully, but quite ready to accept anything that was going.

"Nothing will persuade me that he did not know that some of us didn't like shrapnel, for whenever he heard it he'd rub himself against our legs, purring his very loudest. There was one young chap who had just come out and was in a mortal funk all the time, though he did his best not to show it. When bullets were falling like hailstones round us he'd dole out bits of bully to Moustache on purpose to keep him near; and Moustache stayed with him of his own accord when the bits of bully beef gave out.

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“ ‘I can’t stand it any longer,’ the youngster groaned one morning, his face all drawn and grey with fright. The firing had never ceased for hours, and two of his chums were done for. I didn’t say a word, for the Boches were still at it, but I pointed to Moustache, who was fast asleep on the edge of a ruined wall. At that moment a shell burst close beside him, covering him with rubbish. D’you think it scared him? Not a bit of it! He just got up and shook himself, and then flopped down again as if it wasn’t worth noticing. That did more to steady the young chap’s nerves than folks at home would ever guess. . . . What! Is that five already? Sorry I must be going. See you again soon, Grandmother.”

He kissed the old lady, and smiled at Lallie, who was hugging Dusky very close.

“Oughtn’t I to go too?” she asked.

“Not yet, my dear, unless you’re tired of an old woman’s company,” said Madam Cree. “I’ll send you home presently in the dogcart. Yes, I know where you’re staying—at the Mill House. I saw you in church on Sunday.”

Black Queen had followed John down the lane. Lallie watched her admiringly till she disappeared; she looked just like a small black tiger.

“If only she’d lived three thousand years ago she’d have been in a temple instead of on a farm,” said Madam Cree, taking up her knitting. “Did anyone ever tell you before that the ancient Egyptians worshipped cats, and for hundreds of years held them sacred? Even when the priests let them live in people’s houses, they were treated with deepest respect; if one died, the family to whom it belonged had to shave off their eyebrows to show their grief, while to kill a cat meant certain death. If a house caught fire, the first thing to be saved was the cat, no matter what

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else was destroyed. And now—why, not long ago, in one single year, nearly thirty thousand starving cats were taken off the streets of London! Just think of it, Lallie! Would you believe men and women could be so cruel?

“I don’t suppose for a moment they think what they’re doing when they turn out a cat they’ve grown tired of, or leave one behind and go for their holiday without arranging for it to be fed. They forget that mice sometimes stay in their holes, and that birds are not caught on dusty roads! So their pets die by inches, unless by good fortune some one gives them a whiff of chloroform.”

Nikko had gone to explore the kitchen, whence he guessed the cakes had come, and Dusky, curled into a fluffy black ball was still fast asleep on Lallie’s knee.

“His coat’s like fine silk,” she said, touching it softly, and feeling very sorry for the poor starved cats whose mistresses were so unkind.

“To keep it like that,” said Madam Cree, whose cheeks had gone pinker than ever, “you must brush it every morning with quite a soft brush, and then wipe it over with a piece of chamois leather. Dusky’s half Persian, and the fur of long-haired cats soon gets out of condition if they are not regularly groomed. Cats sometimes grow very ill indeed through swallowing long hairs that get into their mouths when they’re washing themselves, for these become matted inside them. It’s quite a good plan when a cat’s hair comes off to give him half a teaspoonful of olive oil every morning before he has his breakfast. The hairs he swallows won’t hurt him then, and he’ll probably think the oil a treat.

“Of course, you must keep Dusky warm and dry, and remember that he needs fresh air as much as you do. Don’t

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let him stay out at night, and see that there's some shelter into which he can creep if it comes on to rain in the day-time. Dry cold won't hurt him, but to get his coat wet leads to all sorts of ills. If he doesn't seem well, keep him in a warm room, and don't let children go near him. He may be all right in a day or two, but if not you must send for the vet. A sick cat may pass on a cold, and sometimes a very bad sore throat, all through the house.

" Fill his bowl with clean water every morning, so that he can drink when he likes. It isn't enough to give him milk, you know, as so many people imagine. And even if you want him chiefly as a mouser, you must see he has plenty to eat. The best hunters are cats that are thoroughly well fed; half-starved ones have neither strength nor pluck. Boiled rice and a little milk for breakfast—rice is much better for them than bread if it is thoroughly well cooked—would be a good beginning for the day; for dinner he must have a little lean meat—*not* cat's meat; this isn't wholesome. An ounce will be enough, and you can give him liver or fresh fish—he must never have salt. A saucer of milk would do for him at night, or vegetables, or scraps, with breadcrumbs and gravy. You can vary these as is most convenient, and you'll soon find what's best for him.

" Dusky will give you no trouble at all so far as his behaviour in the house is concerned; but if ever you have to punish a kitten don't strike it. Hold its head to the ground by pressing your hand on the back of its neck, and keep it so for some minutes while you scold it, speaking very gently and sadly. With most kittens this will be quite enough to make them understand that they've done wrong; but if one should misbehave again, when you have scolded it bump its nose on the ground several times, though not hard enough to hurt it. Kittens quickly

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get into good ways if they are properly cared for. They should be let out for a run every hour or so when they are very small.

“The more you make a companion of Dusky, the more loving and intelligent he will become. Talk to him as if he were a little brother, and always be just to him. People who say that cats have no affection are those who make much of their pets for a time and then neglect them. Cats won’t stand that sort of thing. They are not so forgiving as dogs.”

Black Queen had returned to her basket now, and was thoughtfully washing her face.

“What whiskers she has!” said Lallie, and then blushed. Somehow it sounded rude.

“They wouldn’t be handsome on other queens, but they are on her,” laughed the little old lady. “And the really useful things are always beautiful, in their own special way. Next to her eyes, I think her whiskers are the most useful things that she possesses, for it is largely by means of these that she and her tribe find their way in the dark—big cats, such as lions and tigers and leopards, as well as the small ones that we call tame. For their whiskers contain a network of nerves and blood-vessels, and are sensitive to the slightest touch, which you and I should not perceive at all.

“Their eyes help them too, though no animal can see when it is *quite* dark. But a cat can see in a very feeble light—she has what you might call a neat little looking-glass in each of her shining eyes—a very bright lining that reflects the tiniest ray of light there is. This is why cats can see when it seems quite dark to us. My father was a doctor, and he often used to say how wonderfully God has given to all of us the very kind of eyes we need.”

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"Now I know why cats' eyes look like lamps," said Lallie. "Oh! Oh! She's taken my kitten!" Black Queen had lightly jumped on to her lap, and, picking up Dusky in her soft mouth, had leisurely borne him away.

"He was her kitten first," said Madam Cree. "But she is only carrying him on to the lawn—you'll see them romping together. There's the dogcart. Jerry will take you home, and next week you must come again. Then you shall have Dusky. He's too young now to be separated from his mother."

That week seemed to Lallie as if it would never go, though she and Nikko took long walks together when Mother was too busy to come. "How *can* you want a kitten when you have me?" he barked—at least, so Lallie imagined. *I* think that all the time she talked of Dusky *he* was thinking of nice plump rats.

When Saturday came round again the dogcart appeared quite soon after breakfast with a note for Lallie's mother from Madam Cree. Might Lallie spend the day at the farm, it said. If so, she would send her back in the evening. And Mother, who was going to town to meet the boys, was quite pleased to let Lallie go.

Even in one week Dusky had grown, and was, if possible, more frolicsome than before. He was quite impertinent to Black Queen, jumping over her back when she wanted to doze, until at last she sat up and boxed his ears, which sobered him for a while. But soon he was pretending that her tail was a mouse, nibbling at it and darting away.

"He reminds me of the first kitten I ever had," said Madam Cree in the afternoon, when Lallie had been all round the farm and had ridden one of the great brown horses. "She was a stray, and, like Moustache, came from nowhere, stealing up to

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us while we were sitting in the garden, and trying to hide behind my dress. We called her Waif, and she was the great-great-grandmother of Black Queen.

“ That was many years ago, Lallie, but I can remember quite well how she always insisted on coming out walking with us. If we started without her, before we had gone far we would hear a funny little *miaow*! behind us, and there she would be, extremely indignant that she had been left behind. When she was tired she expected to be carried, but she always jumped down before we reached home, and ran on in front as if to tell the neighbours, ‘ See! I have walked the whole way!’ Once she followed us to church. We told her to go home, but, though she turned very meekly away, it was only to hide in the hedge. As she heard our voices when we came out, she flew to us, purring and making such a fuss you would have thought we had been gone for years. The poor little creature was soaking wet, for it had been raining heavily. That she waited until the service was over shows how fond of us she must have been.

“ That same kitten had a habit of tumbling down the well. We always thought that she must believe that it was a gigantic mouse-hole, for nothing would keep her away from it. She fell in three times, and each time she was rescued by a basket let down by a rope. Then she’d stand by the kitchen fire for us to dry her, looking round for a saucer of warm milk.

“ She grew up a fine mouser. I was frightened of mice, and once took her to sleep in my bedroom. In the middle of the night she woke me by jumping up and down on my chest. I had lit a night-light before I went to sleep, and you can imagine how I felt when I saw she had a struggling mouse in her mouth. She had brought it for me to eat!

“ Waif couldn’t bear a noise. I had a little sister who was

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rather spoilt, and inclined to cry when she couldn't get everything her own way. One day she was sitting on a stool before the fire, sobbing loudly because she mightn't go out and roll with the puppies in the snow. Waif *miaowed* once or twice and waited for a little while; then she could bear it no longer. Up she marched to the baby, then stood on her hind-legs and gave her a sharp box on the ears! Mother couldn't help laughing, although she was vexed, and my little sister was so surprised that she left off crying at once.

"If Waif wanted to go out, and the front door was shut, she would go through the kitchen into the scullery, where she had found she could open the door for herself by reaching up and leaning her front paws on the latch. You will scarcely believe this, but if she were shut out she would jump up and pull at the bell!

"None of her many sons and daughters was as perfect a black as she, but a grandson was. We called him Nero because he sat calmly combing out his whiskers by the fire when a red-hot cinder flew out from the hearth and burnt a hole in the rug. But a spark flew in his eye, and he didn't like *that*—he never saw so well again. Ever afterwards the least smell of burning would put him into a frenzy.

"One day Cook burnt the porridge. It made a dreadful smell, and Nero ran up and down the house trying to drag every one he met to the kitchen. He was furious when we wouldn't go. Many cats have saved the lives of whole families by giving the alarm of fire. One climbed up to her mistress's bedroom by the creeper, and clawed at the bedclothes until she awoke, when she saw smoke coming from the stable.

"After Nero, I remember Matilda best. She was a mannish cat who walked with a sort of swagger. We used to spread crumbs

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for the robins in the winter, and we found Matilda so interested that we watched her to see what happened. She used to lie in wait behind a gooseberry bush where the leafless boughs grew very close; and when the robins and sparrows were busy feeding she'd pounce out and kill two at once. We had to leave off spreading those crumbs, for, no matter how carefully we shut her up, Matilda always managed to get out. And those silly little birds were always being caught, no matter where we laid their breakfast. My brother Richard firmly declared that he had actually seen Matilda on the lawn scattering bits of crunched-up biscuit so that the birds might come down. He would never allow that this was not quite true, but none of us really believed him.

"The funniest thing about Matilda was the way she put out her kittens to nurse. The first family she had was barely an hour old when she tucked the three of them under a hen who had made herself a nest beneath the manger of the cowshed where Matilda's babies were born. The hen seemed quite pleased—she was a broody old thing—and Matilda at once went off hunting. She returned now and then to feed those poor babies, sometimes sprawling under the hen herself. People used to come from quite a long way to see the kittens with their adopted mother. It was amusing to watch her frantic efforts to cover them with her wings when they grew big."

Black Queen had gone to the wicket-gate; she was watching for John, who would soon be coming.

"How does she know it is tea-time?" asked Lallie. "She can't be hungry, for Maggie gave her a saucer of warm new milk."

"I can't guess, Lallie, but she always does. She is very fond of John—he talks to her a lot. She fretted dreadfully when he was ill, and she was not allowed to go to him. I couldn't get her to eat a bit, and it worried me so that I sent her to my cousin,

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some thirty miles away. The moment they let her out of the basket in which she had made the journey she escaped, and turned up here a fortnight later, draggled and footsore, and so very thin that she looked a mere shadow of herself. No—I can't tell you how she found her way. It is always a puzzle to me."

"Cats *are* puzzling, I think, but nice!" said Lallie. And she kissed the top of Dusky's head.

CHAPTER THREE

FEATHERED HEROES

“LONDON’S rather a jolly place,” said Morris, munching away at his fourth sandwich and wishing he had brought some more. There were two large bananas in his pocket, and a fat slab of chocolate at the bottom of the bag that Aunt Elly had filled with biscuits; but the British Museum makes you very hungry when you’ve been there for hours and hours.

The man who sat on the seat beside him felt for another cigarette, and smiled.

“That’s so,” he said. “I used often to think of it when I was out in France—the jolly old crowds, and the lights, and the faces—even its jolly old fogs. . . . Thanks, but I don’t think I’ll have a banana. Very good of you, all the same.”

Except for the hum of the New Oxford Street traffic, it was very quiet outside the Museum that warm day in early spring. Little white cloudlets like flocks of doves sailed over the blue of the sky, and the pigeons who sunned themselves on the wide stone steps had the courtyard almost to themselves. Their gleaming breasts, purple and gold and green, were lovelier than any treasure in the great Museum, and when they rose, with a soft whirl of wings, to circle for a moment above the head of a most magnificent policeman, the stranger gave them a clap.

“Aren’t they *grand*?” he said, as they spread themselves on the ground to feast on the grain which some one threw them.

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"They are the pluckiest birds. If you knew what they, or rather others like them, did in wartime, youngster, you wouldn't be grinning at me. Tell you? Let's see how the time's going first. I have an appointment at three."

"It isn't more than two," Morris eagerly assured him. "And I was only grinning because you looked so—so *proud*. I'm awfully fond of pigeons, really. I'm going to keep some. I live in the country—I'm only up for the day."

"Well, look after them properly if you want to have healthy birds. Canker and roup and rheumatism, and other diseases, come from bad food or water, bad housing or draughts. Where are you going to put them? In a stable loft? Good! That will give them plenty of room, and is likely to be warm and dry. You'll cover the front, of course, with wire-netting, and see that there are no rat-holes in the wainscoting. Better try to find some one who has pigeons himself to come and help you fix them up.

"Don't start with too many birds at once, and get them in pairs, one of either sex, or you'll find you'll have squabbles in your pigeon-cote. You've any number of varieties to choose from, though all the domesticated ones have sprung from the blue rock-pigeon—that bad little bird who makes the farmer so angry by eating so much of his corn. The wood-pigeon is often called the ringdove, while the stock-dove is the smaller wood-pigeon; but, of course, a country lad knows that.

"Owls, tumblers, pouters, fantails, magpies, dragons, and homers are some of the many descendants of the rock-pigeon, and all are larger and handsomer than he. To my taste the homers beat the whole lot. They are the messenger pigeons. Instead of flying round in a circle when they are 'thrown' or 'tossed' into the air, they fly straight back to their homes. In days gone

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by carriers were used for the same purpose, but they are much too expensive now, besides being more difficult to rear.

“ If you decide on homers you’ll have great sport in training the young birds you breed. Better start in July, when they’re three or four months old, and begin by taking them, shut up in a basket, about a mile away from home. Then toss them—they are fairly sure to be back again almost at once. Wait a few days, and then try them with three miles, and so on as often as you like, increasing the distance every time, and resting them in between. Young pigeons are often lost when they are being trained—you must be prepared for this. The best birds may fly as far as five hundred miles; in America, I remember, a pigeon has been known to fly home when thrown up more than a thousand miles away.

“ Whichever kind you go in for, you’ll find it pays you in every way to make them as comfortable as you can. Each pair should have a separate nesting-box; and see that you give them plenty of perches, which must be kept clean and dry. Clean out the loft at least once a day, and don’t forget the corners; if you do, dust and dirt will collect there and encourage insect pests.

“ Always give your birds clean water, and plenty of it. Their bowl should be emptied out and refilled first thing in the morning and again in the afternoon; for if they drink water that has been fouled they are certain to be unhealthy.

“ Two good meals a day will be enough for them—one in the morning and one at night. You can get specially prepared mixtures from any corn-dealer, or you can give them any good sound corn, dried peas, barley, tick-beans, etc. Let them have all they can eat at a time, but don’t leave any food about the floor. If you do, and they eat it when it has been fouled, it will act as a poison to them. Give them plenty of good grit; when they eat

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this it passes on into their gizzards and helps them to crush the corn. Without it, they're sure to have indigestion, as you would if you didn't use your teeth.

"Let your birds out for exercise before you feed them. In this way they will make straight for the loft when they return from their flight."

"My cousin kept pigeons once," remarked Morris, "but a number of them died when they moulted."

"He should have given them linseed—a handful to every ten birds. About fifteen drops of tincture of iron added to each gallon of water is good for them too at this time, or he could have kept a rusty nail in the water bowl instead. Moulting is quite a natural process, but when birds are in any form of captivity, under conditions different from those Nature intended, they always require special care.

"I can't imagine any pets more interesting to keep than homers. The first lot I saw when I was in France lived in a motor-bus that once upon a time used to ply to and fro in Piccadilly. The top of the outside, with a slip of the inside too, was roofed in to form a cage, and the men who looked after them lived in what was left.

"In front of the cage there was an opening by which birds could fly in, though, owing to a very clever arrangement, they couldn't get out. A board was poised just inside the opening, and when a bird touched it an electric bell rang inside the bus. Then the men knew that a pigeon had returned, and hurried to find its message. It had previously been taken to the trenches in a basket, to be set free at once to return to the loft if the telegraph wires had been cut. If not, it was kept for twenty-four hours, to be ready in case of need. Birds were always sent in couples—two males or two females. If you sent a pigeon and

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his mate you couldn't be sure they would come straight home—they might find each other's company too pleasant! Each pigeon is ringed when it is quite young, and is always known by the number on the ring.

"Very often, indeed, these messenger pigeons brought news of the utmost importance. When the bell announced an arrival, a soldier at once crept into the cage to take its message, which was written on a thin piece of paper and tied to its leg. The message was then copied and sent on to headquarters. Our pigeons took a minute to cover a mile on short distances—twelve miles or so—but I should think forty miles an hour would be the ordinary speed on long ones."

"How do they know how to come?" asked Morris. One had alighted so near that he could see its small head turning this way and that, and it didn't seem possible, somehow, that there could be room inside it for all the knowledge it must possess.

"No one can really tell us that, though people are always trying to guess. All birds, as you very likely know, have a marvellous sense of direction—how else could the 'migrants,' as they are called, find their way as they do, every spring and autumn, over hundreds of miles of sea and land? You must often have watched the swallows that come to us every spring gathering in great flocks when summer is over, flying high in the air with excited little cries, ready to start for a warmer climate. Most of them winter in Africa, I believe—and think what a distance for them to travel! Well, pigeons, no doubt, have this sense of direction too, but many people now consider that they are guided chiefly by means of their marvellously sharp eyes, and their very wonderful memories. The eye of a bird is quite different from the human eye—it can see a tremendous distance. As for its

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memory, the excellence of this is beyond doubt. You'll find proof of it every day.

"Almost the first pigeon-story I ever heard was about one that was sent out from the besieged city of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War. It was captured by the enemy, and for ten years was kept shut up in a cage. At last they set it free, and straight away it made for its own old home."

"The Franco-Prussian War?" said Morris thoughtfully. "That was a long time ago."

His companion laughed. "Long before you were born; but not so very long, for all that. Pigeons were used in warfare as far back as the time of the Crusaders. The Saracens had a complete system of pigeon-post, so the commanders in the Crusaders' armies trained falcons to prey upon the messenger birds, in order that the Turks might not learn from spies what they meant to do. Pigeons were also largely used in the war between Russia and Japan, and there is scarcely a nation now that does not keep a number of trained homers. Though the pigeon air-service has been demobilized, the birds still remain with the Colours. Each military division has its own lofts, and the messengers are transferred to these.

"I should like to see some kind of war memorial put up to remind folks in years to come of how birds and animals helped us to win the War. I could tell you stories about the horses—what's that you say? [Morris had gently murmured "Pigeons!"] All right! I forgot. It's the feathered heroes you want to hear about now.

"One saved hundreds of lives by flying 'home' when so badly wounded that its message was almost driven into its body by the shot which had carried off its leg. It died from exhaustion when it reached its journey's end: so did the bird sent off by four

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of our airmen who were adrift in the North Sea. But it got home first, and the men were rescued when on the verge of starvation.

“ Perhaps you have heard how Skipper Thomas Crisp, V.C., dispatched one of the pigeons that he had brought with him before he was killed at the wheel, under fire from a German submarine. All his crew were saved because of that pigeon . . . one little swift-winged bird!

“ The battle of Arras might have been lost but for two other feathered heroes. Some distance in front of the Allies’ infantry was a tank, and one of her crew spied through his glass the enemy gathering together. At once he released the pigeons, and off they flew straight as arrows to the base. They had to fly some fifteen miles, but in twenty-two minutes the big guns were at work and those enemy masses wiped out. Sorry I must go, but I’ve run it close already. Good-bye—and good luck to your pigeons! ”

He pulled himself up by the arm of the seat, and Morris noticed for the first time the crutches that leant against it.

“ So long! ” cried their owner over his shoulder as he hobbled nimbly down the steps. A moment later and he had passed the gates with a friendly nod to the tall policeman.

“ I shall *certainly* choose homers,” Morris said, and went off to see the Tower of London.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM SHETLAND'S ISLES

THE twins sat solemnly before the fire, toes on the fender and knees hunched up. Raymond was frowning, and Agnes looked sad. Each year that came it grew more difficult to choose Cousin Ralph's Christmas present.

It had to be something that both of them liked. And while Raymond thought longingly of a bat or a football, Aggie sighed in secret for a slim gold bangle, or a hand-bag like Katie Morrison's. Books were easy enough, for Agnes loved pirates, and didn't mind what happened in the middle so long as it all came right in the end. But this year Ralph had told them to choose something else for a change.

"We must write that letter to-night," said Raymond, ruffling his hair till he looked like Shock-headed Peter. Aggie sighed. She had known all the time what she must do.

"Let's ask for a bat," she said generously. "That was a stunning one we saw when we went to the Stores with Mother. I'd like us to have a better one than Jim's. *You* might make a century then."

"No go," said Raymond, shaking his head, "though it's jolly decent of you to suggest it. But we've got to choose something that you can use too, and girls are no good at cricket."

"Indeed they are!" cried Aggie indignantly. "Why, Isla Dene——!"

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They then forgot about everything else except the match between the College girls and the juniors at Horton Grammar School. They talked and argued till the tea-bell rang, but Ralph's letter never got written, because after tea they had prep.

In the end they had to leave it to him to give them anything he liked—and as he'd intended to do this anyhow, perhaps it was just as well.

A saddle lay on the table in the hall when they came down on Christmas morning.

"Look outside!" said Mother, as they stopped to stare at it. And there in the drive stood the loveliest Shetland pony, brown from head to foot, with a flowing mane and tail and the brightest of bright brown eyes.

"So it's *you* I'm going to belong to, is it!" he whinnied as they flew to his side, and thrust his velvet nose in Aggie's hand to see what she had for him.

"It's sugar he's wantin' the noo, I'm thinkin'," said Angus, who held his bridle. So sugar they brought him, and a fine big apple, which he crushed with the whitest of teeth. Angus was grinning from ear to ear as the 'cute little beastie' nosed Ray's pockets to see if he had any more. He had been coachman before the car came, and to his thinking a horse or a pony was worth double the best motor ever built.

When the pony was brought round again he was saddled all ready for the children to ride, and his harness gleamed in the sunlight.

"He looks *sweet*!" cried Agnes.

"Ripping!" said Raymond. "I say, isn't Ralph a *brick*? Mother says he's always giving things to us because he scarcely ever had presents when he was a kid himself. He and she were



THAT WAS A WONDERFUL AFTERNOON

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chums. He used to come to her whenever he got into trouble with Uncle Griff."

That was a wonderful afternoon, exactly like one in a book. Up and down the glistening white road they went, turn in turn upon Sheltie's back. Old Angus told them they were 'learning fine,' and Sheltie never once stumbled, though it was freezing hard.

It seemed as though they had only just come out when the shining white hills in the distance grew pink, and the sun, now a flaming ball of red, dipped down behind the crest of the wood.

"I do wish," said Aggie, as they turned towards home, "that to-morrow could come to-day!" And though Raymond laughed, he was just as sorry to leave Sheltie and go indoors.

When they raced up to the schoolroom to roast chestnuts, they found Ralph in the big armchair, pretending to be asleep. He only snored when they tried to tell him what a splendid time they had had, and wouldn't wake up till they promised faithfully that they wouldn't thank him any more.

"Sheltie was born on the Mainland of the Shetland Islands," he told them presently, puffing away at his pipe. "Until he was two he ran wild on the moors, with scores of other young foals and their mothers. Wherever he went the salt breath of the sea blew over his coat, which was so shaggy and thick that it was like a little house piled on his back and all round him. He needed it, for the winds were bitter, and in winter the nights were so long and so dark that sometimes the sun set five hours after rising. To make up for this, in summer-time it was only hidden for seven; but I don't suppose Sheltie minded either way; he was free, and his mother was beside him.

"When he was somewhere about two years old his coat began to fall off. He was hardy enough by this time, you see, to stand

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the frost, which was so intense in winter that it might have killed him when he was small. So Nature began to take off his little house—bit by bit, so as not to give him cold. For some time it hung in rags and tatters round him, and he looked a very queer little fellow till his new coat came—the one he's wearing now. It is still much thicker than that of other ponies, but this time he will not lose it.

"It must have been an awful day for him when he was caught and carried off, to be sold and then broken in. It was lucky for him he was so finely made, for less well-favoured Shetlands are bought up by costers, who may or may not know how to treat them, or to work as pit-ponies in the mines. They are sweet-tempered animals, and very docile, which is why they're so much in demand. Sheltie's three years old now, and if he's well cared for he'll be fit to work until he's thirty. It all depends on this: good food and a warm dry stable he must have if he's to do his best.

"But no matter how well he is housed and fed, he won't be happy unless you love him. Like every other animal, he needs affection, and since he's been taken away from his kindred it's up to you to give him this. It's the same with all tame creatures—you've *got* to make much of them, or they'll fret, and grow dull and listless. When you look at an animal you can almost always tell what sort of person his master is—a selfish chap who just uses him, and treats him as a machine, or one who remembers he is a 'little brother,' and does all that he can to keep him happy, though he's robbed of his birthright, freedom."

"We couldn't *help* loving Sheltie," said Agnes. "I believe he knows us quite well already. Will he grow any bigger? Angus says he won't."

"Angus is right. He has finished growing, though he may broaden out a bit. Many Shetland ponies are smaller still. Some

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of the foals on the other islands don't weigh more than twelve pounds at birth. The Orkney ponies are biggest of all; they are rougher and less well shaped. The tiniest come from Unst and Yell; their heads are so large and their legs so short that they look like the little gnomes of Ponyland. But they're very intelligent, and so strong and hardy that in the North of England they use them as pit-ponies down in the mines."

"Father was telling us about them last week," said Raymond, "and Aggie"—he gave a sly pull at her curls—"Aggie almost cried when she heard that for years and years the poor little things never saw the light."

"It sounded so dreadful—to be always in the dark!" said Aggie, her bright face clouding. "A pony named Sandy, Father said, had quite forgotten what green fields were like. He didn't know what to make of it when they brought him up because there was a coal-strike and they couldn't leave him in the mine to starve. At first he seemed dazed, but after a little while he snorted, and would have galloped away like mad if they hadn't held him in. For five weeks he was allowed to run loose in a meadow, and he loved it so much that when the strike was over, and they tried to force him into the cage to take him down the pit again, he fought and struggled with all his might. But he had to go in the end."

"Poor Sandy! I'm awfully sorry for him too," said Ralph. "I'm always hoping they'll find some way to run coal-trucks through the narrow galleries without using ponies at all. Less than a hundred years ago children did this—little naked children, with chains attached to strong belts round their waists and then fastened on to the trucks."

"When it was forbidden by Act of Parliament, coal-owners thought of the ponies, and for some time no one seemed to care

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what happened to the poor little things. But the R.S.P.C.A.—these letters stand for a big society of kind men and women which is working to protect them and gain more inspection—sent down into all the mines to look after them and see that they were not treated cruelly. They do this still, and pit-ponies to-day are usually well taken care of—though nothing can possibly be as good for them as fresh air and green fields and the sun.

“Many of the miners are very fond of them, and pet them as you’ll pet Sheltie. One pit-pony I know of—yes, it was a Shetland!—certainly saved the life of the man who drove it. This was Sir Harry Lauder. He is famous now for making people laugh with his jolly songs, and he has as much money as he can spend. But in those days he was poor—just a collier-lad who worked in the mines like any other.

“One day as he drove his pony through a cutting, deep down in the heart of the mine, it stopped, and refused to stir another step, in spite of all its master’s coaxing. At last he gave it a cut with his whip; it swerved aside, and a moment later the roof of the gallery just in front of them fell in! As Sir Harry Lauder said when he gave away the prizes at a donkey parade for the R.S.P.C.A. at Blackpool, if that pony had gone on, the two of them would have been buried alive.”

“How did the pony know, Ralph?”

“That I can’t tell, Ray, but I sometimes wonder if animals haven’t a certain ‘sixth sense’ that tells them things in some way that we can’t understand. Or it may be that with them touch and sight and scent and hearing are very much keener than with us. When I was in India years ago I remember an occasion when we had been hunting deer, and the horse I was riding suddenly began to tremble and would not go on another inch. ‘He smells tiger!’ said one of my companions, whose own horse was prancing

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and curvetting. And a tiger there was; my friend killed it at first shot as it charged at us from a thicket. No doubt the fine fellow had been hunting deer too, and was on his way home to bed.

"In countries where there are often earthquakes, horses and mules warn their riders that one is coming by the signs of uneasiness they show. Other animals too seem to know that there is something wrong long before any of us do; it's as though they were aware of underground tremors that are too faint for us to feel. The poor things are frantic with fear between the shocks, horses and dogs particularly."

"Have you ever been in an earthquake?" asked Ray.

"Yes—once," said Ralph. "It was at Valparaiso. I was on board ship in the bay. The first thing we heard was a terrific barking from all the dogs in the town, as if they had suddenly gone mad. Then followed the crash of falling houses, and piercing shrieks from women and children. Before morning the dogs had barked themselves hoarse. Many of them could only croak, poor things. They were lucky to escape with their lives."

Before Ralph went away next day he told them more stories of Shetlands. One was about a pony from the Orkneys. He wasn't handsome by any means, but as clever and bright as could be.

"His master, who was a pupil-teacher, bought him to ride to school," said Ralph, "as his house was quite a long way off. Merrylegs was sent to him straight from the Islands, and he certainly did his birthplace credit. He was always willing and never tired, and trotted about without being shod as though on his native heather. After a while his master thought he would travel more comfortably on the roads with shoes on; so he was taken to a village blacksmith, who soon set him up with these.

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“Merrylegs evidently approved of them, and all went well until he lost one, which bothered him a good deal. His master couldn’t take him at once to be reshod, for the smithy was some miles away; so Merrylegs thought he’d look after himself. He did not intend to hobble!

“The blacksmith was very busy at his forge when he looked up and saw, to his surprise, the little Shetland coming towards him with no halter on, and no one behind him.

“‘Be off!’ he cried, thinking he had strayed from home, but Merrylegs wouldn’t go. So the blacksmith began to pelt him with stones (I hope he didn’t mean to hurt him!). At this Merrylegs thought it wise to retire, but only for a little while.

“Soon he was back at the forge again, his clever head in at the door. The blacksmith got up to drive him away, and then saw that he had lost a shoe.

“‘So that’s it, is it!’ he said to himself. And patting him kindly, he forged one for him, the pony watching with great interest. When it was on, he pawed once or twice to see if it fitted properly, then gave a pleased neigh by way of saying ‘Thank you,’ and trotted off home again. His master was extremely puzzled to find him reshod, as well he might be, and it wasn’t until he called at the smithy that he learned how sagacious Merrylegs had been.”

The story that Agnes liked best of all was about a pony which Ralph called Jerry.

“He belonged to a family of children,” he said, “who made him their playfellow. He was a tiny creature, and very frolicsome, joining in all their games. When they weren’t going to ride him he was turned out to grass in a field a short distance from the house. It was forbidden ground to the children, because at one end of it ran a deep stream. Great clumps of forget-me-nots

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grew on its borders, and a beautiful kingfisher had built its nest in the hollow of a tree close by.

“One day the children’s mother was amazed to see Jerry galloping across the lawn, looking very excited and neighing loudly. She knew something was wrong, and ran out to him, when he at once turned round and headed for the field, looking over his shoulder as a dog might have done to make sure that she was following. By scrambling through a hedge and clearing a low wall, he led her straight to the stream, where one of the children had slipped from the bank and was now clinging to a bush. The others had not known what to do, but the pony had kept his wits about him and brought help before it was too late.”

“If Sheltie knew how clever his folks were, wouldn’t he be proud!” said Agnes.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROSY AND ANOTHER

AN east wind blew through the dusty streets, and the sailor drew closer the piece of sacking wrapped round the cage he was carrying. Rosy didn't like the cold. In the vast green forest where she and other grey parrots had flocked in their countless numbers, the air had been always soft and warm, and the sunlight threw flickering bars of gold between the thick clusters of the leaves. But there wasn't a sign of the sun to be seen to-day, and she shivered under her feathers. Why the sailor-man whistled she couldn't think, and as he hurried down the crowded pavement she made queer little grumbling noises.

He had brought her home from a voyage to West Africa as a companion for his old mother. "I'm that lonesome," she had written, "now that Sally's gone and married that I don't know where I be." This was why Rosy had been bought from a planter who was just off to Cape Town.

"She's been well brought up," he told Jack with a grin. And Rosy flirted her rose-red tail, and said "Thank you, sir" so primly and sedately that Jack was doubled up with laughter.

Just now his bronzed face was wreathed in smiles as he pictured how pleased his 'old lady' would be when Rosy displayed her accomplishments. He had taken great pains on the homeward voyage to teach her to say "I'm pleased to meet you!" when he took her out of her cage.

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"There, Mother!" he chuckled, as, fluttering her wings, the parrot perched on his wrist. "Her'll be real comp'ny for you, her will. Her'll chatter so's you wun't know as Sally's gone."

But Rosy, usually so polite, had been upset by the cold. She pecked indignantly at the sailor's horny finger when he gently tickled her throat, and all she would do in the way of speaking was to yell "Get out, you lubber!" And that night she mimicked the *Kestrel's* foghorn till all the neighbours were aroused, while when Jack went down in his bare feet to scold her she screeched at him "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

"Yew take her off this minnit, me lad," the old lady said to him next morning, as Rosy, still very much upset, expressed her disgust at the smoking oil-stove by shrieking like a herd of monkeys. "Feelin' strange-like, is she? Well, so be I. Take her off before I douses her wi' cold water."

A few minutes later—big Jack knew better than to 'argyfy' with his mother—he was trying to cover the cage again; once more he was hurrying down the streets, and the wind blew keener than ever. Rosy sat in one corner, all huddled up, a very unhappy bird. She knew perfectly well that she was in disgrace, and felt dreadfully ill and homesick.

"Now, what be I goin' to do wid ye?" asked Jack, and she gave a feeble squawk as he bumped into a lamp-post and shook her cage. He hadn't been looking where he was going, so troubled was he as to her fate, and a tall policeman, just going off duty, looked at him with suspicion.

"What have you got there?" he asked him sternly. The sailor threw back the covering from the cage and showed a forlorn bunch of feathers with a rose-red tail at one end.

"Know anyone as wants a parrot, sir?" he asked, for the tall policeman's face was kind, and his eyes looked as if he were

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smiling. Perhaps Rosy saw this too (she was a clever bird) for she said "Pleased to meet you!" in just the very way Jack had hoped she would say it to his mother.

There was a moment's pause, while the tall policeman wondered if a certain little girl named Madge would have time to look after a bird. Then, "What'll you take for her?" he said, never doubting Jack's right to sell her. He knew an honest man when he saw one, and Jack's character was written in his face.

The sailor named his price, and after a bit of bargaining, for the tall policeman had a thrifty soul, Rosy and her cage changed hands.

It was hard on poor Jack, but from that very moment the parrot was on her best behaviour. As her new owner bore her away she hummed a pleasant little song, seeming quite grateful to him for his attention when he stopped to shield her more securely from the sleet that came with each fresh gust of wind. No sooner did she find herself in a warm room than she sidled up to the bars of the cage and said "Won't you kiss me?" so saucily to the tall policeman that he blushed. The little girl had a big sister, who was standing near, and she blushed too. Then they both laughed, and Rosy was fed with boiled rice.

In two or three days she was so much at home that they left the door of her cage wide open as it hung in the sunny window. Grace, the big sister, was a dressmaker, and bright-coloured lengths of silk and satin were sometimes strewn on the long wooden table which ran down one side of the room. Rosy never hurt them, though now and then she lifted their soft folds with her beak, but she never could resist hiding Grace's scissors if she dropped them down on the floor.

By now she was rather tired of boiled rice, and her appetite began to fail. She grew a bit short in her temper, too, and snapped

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at Madge's fingers when she took out the perch that she had bitten through.

"I expect we're not feeding her properly," said Grace. "I wish that Ben"—this was the tall policeman—"had remembered to ask the sailor what to give her. Perhaps Miss Mary will know. She knows most things. I believe she came home last night."

Miss Mary lived at the top of the house in a long low room that had a big window from which you could see the sea if you leant right out and looked sideways. She was quite old, Madge thought, for her hair was grey and her face criss-crossed with tiny wrinkles. Her eyes were grey too, and, like Ben's they smiled at you even when her lips were grave.

"Is that you, child?" she cried, as she heard Madge come tripping up the wooden stairs. She was rummaging in a cupboard that ran under the roof, and Madge wondered where she had gone. "I'm quite well again now," went on the cheerful voice. "They were very kind to me in the Infirmary. Wait a minute! There! I've got it now. I was just coming down to see if this would be of any use—it may be larger than yours."

And out the little lady came, lugging a cage as big as herself.

"A bird is miserable in a narrow space," she said as they carried it down between them. "Another parrot used to live in this, but he died. When I heard of yours I was glad I had kept his cage."

It was more than twice the size of Rosy's, and oblong instead of square. There was plenty of room for any parrot to stand upright on her perch if she liked, and pass to and fro between it and the swing without even ruffling a feather. A grating was fixed above the sand-tray, so that even if Rosy were inclined for mischief she couldn't scatter the sand on the floor. The food- and water-tins were hung outside, where she could easily reach them.

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"Thank you ever so much—it was just what we wanted!" said Grace. "I meant to buy her a new cage myself as soon as I could afford it."

"Kiss me!" said Rosy, sidling up to Miss Mary. It really did seem that she must know what she was saying, though Ben had declared the night before that words meant nothing to parrots.

Miss Mary earned her living by painting cards to wish people happy Christmases and happy birthdays. She could not get the right colours by lamplight, so when it grew dusk she came down again, this time to bring Rosy a banana. Grace had gone out to fit her best customer, so Madge and she were alone.

"She does so remind me of Greybeard," she said wistfully. "Yes—that was my parrot. He was grey, like Rosy, but his tail was a deeper red than hers and just a little bit longer. He hadn't a beard, of course, though I called him Greybeard, but underneath his beak the feathers were very bunchy, and he seemed to like that name.

"When I had him first his eyes were grey too, though later they turned pale amber; he was so young that his neck feathers were only sprouting, and his wing quills were soft at the roots. Young parrots need a lot of care, particularly these grey ones from West Africa. Green Amazons are more hardy, and though they don't usually talk quite so much they're more sociable as a rule with strangers.

"At that time I lived in the country, in a dear little house with a veranda round it, and a garden that was full of flowers. I had roses and lilies and pinks and hollyhocks, and great bushes of lavender that the bees loved, and even in winter violets and primroses peeped out in a sheltered corner. Greybeard's cage always stood on this veranda on sunny days, and often he followed me about the garden. I found it quite easy to teach him to talk—

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he soon learned to know what I wanted. When I'd covered his cage well over with a cloth—parrots are much more docile in the dark, especially before they know you well—I would say a short sentence several times over, repeating each word very slowly and distinctly until he said it after me. Then I rewarded him by tickling his throat and giving him bits of sweet biscuit. He loved this, but much wasn't good for him. Very often when pet birds are ailing it's because they've been wrongly fed.

"At first I gave him soft-boiled maize, with a little ripe fruit, every day; he had seed also—canary- and sunflower-seed mixed, or oats and hemp. It's best to give dry and oily seeds together. As he grew older I left off the soft food, which he did not need any longer, and gave him more seed instead. He was fond of raw vegetables as well as fruit—carrots were always a treat to him—and a cuttlefish bone, which I bought from a chemist, was just what he wanted to sharpen his beak on. It kept him from gnawing his perch. I always put the bough of a tree in his cage—not laburnum: that's poisonous, you know—to make him feel more at home, poor darling. But I very seldom fastened the door unless I thought cats were about."

"What else did you give him to eat?" asked Madge. "I know now why Rosy's peevish!"

"A bone, now and then, with a little meat on it, but parrots must not have too much animal food. I've heard people say they shouldn't have water, but that's wrong, for although in their native lands they eat so much fruit that this gives them all the moisture they require, it's different when they're in captivity. Let Rosy have just a few sips to begin with, for if she's been kept without it for long she might drink too much and be ill. Sometimes I used to let my Greybeard drink a sip of tea or coffee from my saucer, and it never seemed to do him any harm."

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"That's what Rosy was after this morning," cried Madge. "All breakfast she was calling 'Greedy! Greedy!' and clucking like a hen, and miaowing. And when Gracie shut her up in our bedroom, she shouted 'Jack!' over and over again. She was calling the sailorman."

"Poor Rosy—she wanted company! Parrots go about in flocks at home; they're such sociable birds that it makes them quite wretched if they are kept in a room by themselves and can't see what is going on. And they're so affectionate. A little green Amazon belonging to a dear old man, a country doctor, cried 'William! William!'—her master's name—for days after he died, and would not be comforted. When they're free they are very devoted to their mates; if one is ever seen apart from the other it's because the hen-bird is sitting on her nest. Otherwise she would be with him.

"A pair of parrots who had lived together in the same cage for years were particularly fond of each other. The poor hen grew gouty, and her legs swelled so that she could not get down from her perch. For months her mate fed her with his beak, until she flopped to the bottom of the cage, too weak to hold on any longer. In vain he tried to help her up, catching hold of her by her beak or the top of her wings; and when she grew worse, and could not eat, he even attempted to open her beak and force food into it. He pined away with grief when she died, living only a few weeks longer."

Madge's eyes were beginning to fill with tears, but before they had time to fall Miss Mary was telling her another 'quite true' story—this time about a parrot who went to stay with a M. Théophile Gautier, a French writer, while her owner was away from home.

"This writer had a cat whom he called 'Madame Théophile'

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because he thought so much of her. When Madame Théophile saw the green bird, very scared and hunched up at one end of a perch, her emerald eyes began to glow like gems, and she jumped on a table to stare at him. Was he a fowl? Was he good to eat? She decided that he was, and licked her lips in an ecstasy of pleasure.

“The parrot scented danger, and rattled the chain that fastened his foot to his perch. Then he sharpened his beak on the edge of his feeding-tin, as a hint that he was not quite defenceless.

“But the cat didn’t mind a bit. She was just going to spring when the parrot said, ‘Have you breakfasted, James?’

“The cat was terrified. This green fowl spoke as her master did! He couldn’t be a bird at all.

“Then the parrot, seeing that she was impressed, began to shout as if he were very angry. The cat made a sudden rush under the bed, and there she stayed all that day.

“Next morning, feeling better after her night’s rest, she again got ready to spring at him, but now the parrot knew what to do. He spoke to her sternly, and she gave it up, deciding that this queer green fowl was a gentleman, and must be treated with respect.”

It was very strange, but just at this moment Rosy took it into her head to miaow again—not loudly at first, but very gently, as if she were some wee kitten. Then she pretended to be a mother-cat, and miaowed louder, but still very kindly. Then she barked like a dog; then, in a storm of hisses, nearly flung herself off her perch.

“You can see she has been where there are cats,” said Miss Mary. “I knew a cat and a parrot who were friends until one day they fell out about some trifle—perhaps the cat upset the parrot’s food. At any rate, Polly was very indignant, and the cat slunk out of her reach. An hour or two later, when Polly was

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on the table—she was more often out of her cage than in—she called very sweetly, ‘Puss! Puss! Come then, Pussy!’ and Pussy innocently came. With a naughty little chuckle Polly seized with her beak a basin of milk that was standing near, and flung it right over her. Poor Pussy was half drowned, and the basin was broken. But Polly was extremely pleased.

“Another story about a parrot and a cat was told by a great man whose name was Romanes. They had lived together for quite a long time, when one evening the cook, who was making bread, went upstairs to her bedroom, leaving some dough to rise in a deep basin close to the fire. She hadn’t been gone long when the cat rushed after her, mewing and making a terrible fuss.

“‘What’s the matter?’ she asked, but she did not move. So the cat seized her apron and actually tried to drag her in this way down the stairs. Cook reached the kitchen only just in time to rescue a frantic Polly from the dough. She had perched upon it to see what it was, and her own weight, of course, made her sink. If Cook had not come down she would very probably have been smothered.”

“Did your Greybeard do things like that?” said Madge, longing to know what had happened to him.

“*Worse!*” said Miss Mary. “I never knew a bird so curious as he.” Then she smiled and sighed. “He’s gone now, my dear, and though most folks would laugh at my missing him so, I know you will understand. He was such a companion, and so sympathetic. . . . When my neuralgia was very bad, and he saw me sitting with my head in my hands, he would climb up my arm till he reached my shoulder, lay his head against my cheek, and say, ‘Poor Mary,’ as he’d heard my mother say it. . . . He was a great protection too, for my little house was on the high

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road, and tramps often came to the door. If I had any trouble to get rid of one I called, 'Are you there, Richard? I want you!'

"And Greybeard would answer in a deep, gruff voice, 'Coming in a minute, Mary!' Then off that tramp would go in a hurry. He thought I'd a man in the house!

"One night a thief slipped in through the back door, which my little maid had left unfastened. I had some nice pieces of silver then that had once belonged to my grandmother, and he'd packed them neatly in a small black bag, when Greybeard woke up and heard him moving. He must have known that the man had no business there, for he shouted, 'Coming in a minute, Mary!' in the gruffest voice I ever heard.

"That was quite enough for my burglar. Off he went, leaving the bag behind him."

"Well, if Rosy serves us as well as that we shan't complain," smiled Grace, who had just come in.

"Perhaps she will, if she gets a chance," said Madge hopefully. "I shall love her just the same, anyhow, whether she does or doesn't." And Rosy said "Kiss me!" so sweetly that Madge was more sure than ever that she understood.

Some two years later, when Grace and the tall policeman were married, and Madge had a baby niece to nurse, Rosy became a heroine.

They had all gone to live in a much nicer street—Miss Mary too, for they'd grown so fond of her that they wouldn't leave her behind. Rosy, who had the run of the house, used to sleep in the kitchen for the sake of warmth. It was another bitter winter. One night, when every one was sound asleep, she suddenly started singing—a funny song she had heard at sea, not at all the kind that Grace liked! After this she began to cough and to sneeze, and when,

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even then, no one came downstairs, she used sailor-language that brought Miss Mary flying to cover her cage with a cloth.

Before she was half-way down the stairs Miss Mary smelt smoke and gave the alarm. A cinder had fallen on the rug from the fire, and the big armchair that stood beside it was now a mass of flames. Rosy's cage was snatched from the kitchen just in time; two minutes more and it would have been too late. As it was, they managed to put out the fire before much damage was done.

"If Rosy hadn't been there to wake us we might have been burnt to death!" said Grace, hugging her baby very close. And though Madge was sorry that Ben's chair was spoilt, while nothing was left of the nice new rug, she couldn't help feeling a little bit glad that Rosy had had her chance.

CHAPTER SIX

A HAPPY FAMILY

A FINE half-holiday, and nothing to do! Anthony sauntered down the long white road feeling very sorry for himself. He couldn't play cricket with the other boys, because last term a ball had caught his knee and hurt it so badly that he limped still, and might limp to the end of his days. Sometime, he supposed, he would get used to it, and then he might enjoy looking on at a cricket match. To-day he felt he couldn't bear it. He would go to the woods—it would be cooler there, and he need not be back until prep. None of the others would be in to tea. They would have it out there on the field.

A rabbit scurried across his path and vanished into the hedge. "Lucky little beast!" he thought enviously as it flashed by—he did not know in what terror it went of a hungry and agile stoat. A little farther on a motor-cycle, hooting its loudest, whirled round the bend, and a snow-white hen who had been taking a dust-bath lay squawking feebly in the road.

Anthony stopped to pick the poor thing up, hating the hooting and tearing cycle, which was now out of sight again. She was too much injured to live, as he saw; there was nothing he could do except to lay her down by the side of the road. Even as he did so her eyes glazed over, and a heap of draggled feathers on the soft green grass was the end of that pretty white hen.

"What have you got there?" some one asked sharply. Anthony

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started and looked round. A very old lady was standing close by, the bugles on her bonnet sparkling in the sunshine, and her face criss-crossed with many lines. Ashamed to find that his voice was husky—he had a lump in his throat—Anthony told her what had happened.

“Never even to stop and see what he had done!” she said, and her black eyes blazed. They softened suddenly as she looked at Tony. “*You* did your best for her, anyhow,” she added, gathering that heap of feathers against the bosom of her black silk gown. “She was one of my hens—Pretty Jane. . . . She fed from my hand this morning, and now——”

She spoke no more as she walked on ahead, but signed to him to follow. Half a mile farther on towards the wood they came to a house standing back from the road in the midst of trim lawns and a rose garden. The door, before which hung a swaying green blind, stood wide open, and the old lady held it back so that Tony might pass in before her. She seemed to have taken it for granted that he would accompany her home.

It was beautifully cool in the shaded hall, and big vases of roses perfumed the air. A jug of lemonade stood on a basket-table, and in a deep dish, half hidden by their leaves, were yellow-flecked crimson strawberries. Tony’s mouth watered as he saw them.

“Sit down and help yourself,” said the old lady, pointing to one of the wicker chairs that stood on either side of the table. Then she called “Eliza!” and hurrying from the kitchen came a buxom young woman with rosy-apple cheeks.

“Oh, Miss Maude!” she wailed when she saw Pretty Jane; and the two of them disappeared together.

The strawberries were delicious. So was the lemonade. The flowery cushions of the wicker chair were so comfortable that

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Tony shut his eyes, while he tried to remember what he had heard about Miss Maude and her hens. She treated them all as if they were children, the postmistress had said with scorn; but when everyone else's hens had stopped laying, and eggs were "scarce as gold" in the village, Miss Maude "hed a'ways a'plenty."

When he opened his eyes again, which was not, to tell the truth, for some time, Miss Maude was reading in the other chair. She looked much nicer without the grand bonnet she had worn when she went to town, though she seemed as if she had been crying, and he found it quite easy to tell her all she asked—even how dull he found it at school now that he couldn't play games.

"Mrs Avory—that's our headmaster's wife," he added, "asked if I would help her with her hens (she's only just got them—with a book that's called *How to Have Eggs the Year Round*). But I don't know any more about hens than she does, and they aren't very interesting—except, of course, yours," he finished politely, warned by a snap of those black eyes.

"There's not a creature the good God made that isn't interesting," she answered, "and fowls are more so than many humans! [Tony wriggled—he wished she wouldn't glare so!] If you study them intelligently, you'll find them worth it." And she gave an indignant snort.

A moment later, when Tony was thinking how best he could get away, she smiled.

"You mustn't mind a cross old woman," she told him. "You were very kind to Pretty Jane. When it is cooler you shall see my happy family, and in the meanwhile I'll tell you how to manage the schoolmarm's hens. It's easy enough to keep them well if you're willing to take a little trouble. And that's the least that you can do when you're going to eat up the dear things' eggs."

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Out of a workbag of puce-coloured silk she drew some fine linen she was darning, and as her needle flew in and out she talked without a moment's pause.

Anthony was glad to listen. He thought it safer. It would not be difficult to vex her again, he felt.

"I hope the school fowl-house is not built on damp ground," she began. "If it is, her hens will never do well. It's against a sunny wall, you say? I'm glad to hear it, and I hope that it has a good-sized window to let in the fresh air and the sunshine. A dark, gloomy house depresses cocks and hens every bit as much as it does people. I don't like those fowl-houses of corrugated iron. They're too hot in summer and too cold in winter.

"And I hope it's large enough. Every bird should have two square feet of foot space. The perches should be movable, so that they can be kept clean, and see that they are smooth, and wide enough for the hens to sit on them comfortably.

"The nest-boxes should be movable too, and fairly large, or the eggs are likely to get broken. Line them with hay or fine straw or peat-moss, and put in each a china nest-egg. Twice a year at least the boxes should be lime-washed and disinfected, to keep away insect pests.

"Moss-litter is one of the best coverings for the hen-house floor. If your birds' feet get damp, they'll be liable to cramp; and you'll soon have them dying off.

"Every morning all droppings must be cleared away; and the covered run, which they'll use on wet days, should have a floor of well-beaten earth, so that it can be easily swept. The floor of the open run, for fine days, is best covered with grass, kept short. It ought to be as large as possible, to give the hens plenty of exercise. It's a shame to keep any active creatures shut up where they have no room to move about.

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“ A small hen-coop is a torture chamber to a hen if she’s kept in it for any length of time, so be sure that the coops you use are a good size, with wooden floors, and are raised at least two inches off the ground. A ring of wire netting, which can be moved with the coop from time to time, should be placed outside it some few feet away, so that the chicks may run about in safety, without the risk of being killed by strange dogs or cats who are trespassing on the premises.

“ Don’t forget the dust bath—fowls depend on this to keep their plumage in good order. I have one in a corner of my covered run—fine earth or sifted ashes spread over two or three feet of ground. If Pretty Jane had been content with hers, that motor-fiend wouldn’t have run her down.

“ Now about their food. Give them two good meals a day—the morning ones of scraps from the household, boiled, and mixed with meal or ground oats, sharps, or pollard. In winter I give mine maize—about half-and-half. Parboiled rice is very good for a change; so are boiled swedes and turnips and parsnips, mixed with meal.

“ In the middle of the day let them have some fresh greenstuff—fresh, mind, not stale! The rubbish some folks provide for their fowls is enough to prevent their laying altogether. In the evening give a good meal of grain—barley, wheat, and oats, with now and then a little sunflower-seed. Change the food of your fowls according to the weather, just as you change your own. In summer I find biscuit-meal and sharps the best for them to begin the day on, but in winter the morning and evening meal should always be made hot. Let them eat all they want at the time, but take care to leave no stale food in the run, and to keep this scrupulously clean.

“ They won’t get all the nourishment they might from their food unless you give them grit with it—flint grit, the same as you

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give to pigeons. It helps them to digest what they eat by crushing it fine in their gizzards.

“ Water is just as important as food for them. Keep the drinking-pans clean, and fill them freshly every day, standing them in a shaded corner. To drink tepid water is bad for fowls.”

“ Ours seem to be moulting,” said Tony, when Miss Maude stopped for a moment to find more thread.

“ Then you'll have to change their food. When they're losing their feathers they must not have fat, rice, hemp, or barley. In the morning try a mixture of middlings and pea- and bean-meal, mixed to a thick crumbly mass with warm water, and oats or wheat in the evening. They may have their green food as usual in the middle of the day. A little sulphur should be mixed with their soft food; not more than thirty drops of tincture of iron added to each gallon of drinking water will help to keep them in health.

“ Instead of feeding my baby chicks on chopped egg and bread-crumbs, as my mother did hers, I find they do better on small mixed grain, and, a little later, on bruised wheat. By the way, if you put their water in deep troughs the wee things will fall in and drown. Get an open pan, and stand a well-scrubbed flower-pot upside down in the middle. Then there will be no danger. They—” But at this point Eliza said that tea was ready, so the lecture came to an end.

“ And now you shall see my happy family,” said Miss Maude, when Anthony would eat no more. “ Mrs Billy is in the paddock. I can't say much for her manners as yet, so take care she doesn't trip you up.”

Mrs Billy was a handsome nanny-goat. She was tethered to the grass with a very long chain, being just then rather in disgrace.

“ She squeezed through the hedge,” Miss Maude explained

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sadly, "—how, I can't tell, for, as you see, it's very thick—and got into the kitchen garden. Dobson, my old gardener, says it's ruined. Not a bit of green did she leave."

"Aha!" bleated Mrs Billy triumphantly, and only by dodging very quickly on one side did Tony escape her hearty greeting.

With Miss Maude she was as quiet as a mouse.

"I hate to fasten you up, dear thing," her mistress told her, fondling her head. "But what can I do when you behave like that? It's unworthy of such a well-bred goat."

But Mrs Billy did not seem to care. She tossed her head and bleated again, making playful dives at Tony's legs. He retreated a safe distance beyond her reach, and presently Miss Maude joined him.

"That goat," she said proudly, "gives between two and three quarts of milk a day for months after she has kidded, and in wartime, when milk was very difficult to get—yes, even down here in the country—the mothers of sickly babies came for miles to beg for a jug of it. They throve on it, too, did those babies; if village folk had any sense they would all keep goats for themselves. Goats are easy to feed—they'll browse contentedly on anything they can get—heather and gorse and broom, sow-thistles and docks, swedes, carrots and mangolds, acorns, the thinnings and prunings of hedges, the leaves of trees, and pea- and bean-pods. All's grist that comes to their mill. In winter they must be partly stall-fed—a double handful of grain twice a day while they are yielding milk, and meadow-hay, oats, crushed maize, linseed cake, or pea-straw will keep them in good condition. Grass is sour, you must remember, between October and February, and is then very poor feeding for all beasts."

"A chum of mine has a goat," said Tony. "He was telling me the other day that she follows his sister about like a dog, even

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when she goes for long walks. But they're rather worried about her now. She hasn't been well for some time."

"Mrs Billy often comes out with me," said Miss Maude, "and the children love her. She lets them ride on her back, and last summer she drew a little cart for them. I hope your friend's goat gets plenty of fresh water. You might remind him that there should always be a large piece of rock-salt for her to lick at—goats need this to keep them healthy.

"They hate getting wet, and any kind of shelter can be used as a goat-house so long as it keeps off the rain. It won't need much fitting up. There should be a small hay-rack, and a manger—just a board with a hole in it large enough to hold a basin sunk up to the rim. A goat must have plenty of litter to lie on—a brick or stone floor brings on rheumatism, and you wouldn't like that yourself. You've got to use your brains a bit if you want to keep animals well."

They had been to see the rabbits, and a little black lamb who played with the dogs quite happily, when Tony was introduced to the oldest inhabitant of Red Gables.

"Horatio's not so useful now as Mrs Billy," remarked Miss Maude, as she led the way to the yard. "But he's the dearest creature in the world, and I wouldn't part with him for a king's ransom. I have had him for twenty-five years at least, and though he would still be willing to work, I don't let him do much now. He likes to spend his days in the sunshine with the May Queen to keep him company."

Tony laughed when he saw a placid grey donkey with a fine White Orpington standing just under his nose. She was patiently driving away the flies each time they attempted to settle on it.

"You may well be amused," Miss Maude told him amiably. "They are certainly an odd pair of friends. She was quite a chick

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when she started making love to him, and now she never leaves him if she can help it. On wet days she pecks at the door of his stable until somebody lets her in. Now, Scotty," patting the Aberdeen terrier who had been frisking round her feet, "Scotty chose a bantam as a friend. They would sit together for hours on a sunny window-sill, quite content with each other's company, and when he wanted a change of air he would pick her up very gently by one wing, and carry her off to the lawn. Having set her down, he licked her all over, and she seemed quite pleased with his attentions. When she died he fretted for weeks.

"Another dog, Portia, a fox-terrier, reared a whole family of young chicks whose mother was too fond of gadding about. Portia started her duties before they were hatched one day when the hen had left the nest. On her return Portia moved off the eggs—fortunately none were broken. But she watched until they were left again, and at once took her former place. This went on until the chicks were hatched, when the dog and the hen took it in turns to keep them warm. If Portia were shut up she made such a fuss that we had to let her out. It was pretty to see how gentle she was with them. They could do what they liked with her."

The cock of the yard, a handsome bird, was not too well pleased to see strangers, and whenever he could get near enough without coming under Miss Maude's notice he gave a sharp peck at the strange boy's legs. Tony was not in the least surprised to hear of his conduct to a favourite wife who had hatched out a clutch of duck's eggs.

"It was quite too much for him," Miss Maude explained, "when he saw that brood of baby ducklings. He seemed to feel he had been insulted, and nearly killed her. For days he would not allow her to come near him, but he forgave her in the end."

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A nice little hen, not so handsome as the rest, who were mostly White Orpingtons, was so tame that she perched on the shoulder of her mistress, who stroked her and called her "Sweetie."

"When I fed them last night," she said, "—yes, I feed them myself—this little hen stood on one side to let one who had hurt herself eat first. I am sure she was sorry for her."

"Fowls often show kindness to one another, though some people—poor silly things!—would call this a far-fetched idea. I might have done so too until I stayed at Barmouth some years ago. There was a farm outside the town where a number of chickens were kept. The farmer's sister looked after them, and so of course they did well."

"One day she noticed that a mother-hen whose eggs had not long been hatched seemed ill. All through the week she was growing weaker, though she still *cheep-cheeped* to her chicks, and one morning when the door of the hen-roost was opened the poor creature was found to be dead. But the little chicks had been well looked after, for another hen had come down from the roost and gathered them under her wings, while a cock and a second hen stood near, as if they too wanted to help."

"Jolly decent of them," said Tony heartily, as she walked with him to the gate. "I'm going to take a hand with our chickens and see that they have a good time."

"Ah, *then*," said Miss Maude, her black eyes smiling at him, "I shan't be quite so sorry that Pretty Jane ran into the road!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

GENERAL DENNIKINS

HE was born in a barn, and Greylady, his mother, was the faithful servant of a market-gardener, who never had a good word for her. Year in, year out, she dragged to market sacks of potatoes and carrots and turnips, varied by greenstuff, and fruit in the autumn—rosy apples and huge William pears. Never an apple did she get for herself unless from one of her master's customers; Tom Gaunt wasn't going to waste his money. He was a careful man.

Greylady was too tired to be surprised at anything, but I think she must have been mildly amazed when she first caught sight of the new arrival and heard his weak little cry. All her other foals had been grey like herself, but this one almost shone with whiteness. His coat was like velvet, thick and closely set; he had the most knowing of velvet ears, and liquid eyes brown as hazels.

Tom Gaunt took a look at the two of them presently, and for once in his life he was pleased.

"Worth a tidy sum," he muttered to himself as he passed a rough hand over the young foal's back. "Fancy article. Children's pet." On the strength of his hopes he gave Greylady an extra day off, and even patted her awkwardly when he put her between the shafts again. But he did not dream of lightening her load; what were donkeys for, anyway?

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The first name General Dennikins had was "Snowdrop." It was Tom's young wife who called him this, and sometimes when Tom was digging or planting she would steal into the barn with apples or carrots for the little foal and his mother. Greylady knew her step, and would turn her patient head and watch for the door to open. So did Snowdrop. He was as bright as a button, and though he certainly was fond of apples, he loved even better to be petted.

Every day he went in to town with his mother, trotting beside the cart. He couldn't understand why she did not go faster—he could, and he frisked on a little way ahead to show her how smart he was. It made him shiver when Tom Gaunt struck her. He felt it might be his turn next.

"Hurry, Mother!" he said one day, when Tom had been more unmerciful than usual. Greylady never answered a word, but I fancy that in her heart she hoped he would never feel as tired as she did.

I might not be telling you this story at all if Sunshine Smith had not happened to come across him the day Tom Gaunt offered him to Ditcher's Circus. Sunshine Smith was a soldier, bronzed and tall, with eyes that were always laughing; no one had ever known him out of temper—even his mother always said that the only time she had seen him cross was when, as a very small boy indeed, he wanted to eat a cake of soap and she had taken it away. His comrades christened him Sunshine Smith because he had such a way with him, and wherever he went it really did seem as though the sun had come out. Even Tom Gaunt looked less glum than usual when he talked to him about his donkey.

"Going to sell him to a circus? That jolly little beast? You wouldn't if you knew the awful things that are done to performing animals," he said. "Teach 'em by kindness? Not to jump through

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hoops with lighted tissue paper flaring round them! If decent people knew what the poor brutes suffered they'd get up in a body and leave the place to show what they thought of such cruelties. Look here—I'll give you as much for him as they will. I can't say fairer than that."

This was how Snowdrop first changed hands, and from the moment he touched him he loved the soldier with his whole heart. No dog could have watched for him more eagerly than did Snowdrop, and the way he would caper when he saw him coming, hee-hawing up and down the scale, was the funniest thing in the world. Sunshine Smith called it his "song and dance," and grew so fond of him that he got permission to take the donkey back to his regiment when leave was up.

"He'll be our mascot, sir, and bring us luck," he told his colonel, who had known him since he was a lad. And when Snowdrop marched out to meet his company he became "General Dennikins" on the spot.

Because his spirit had never been broken, Dennikins showed himself a worthy descendant of the splendid wild asses of desert lands, who scour the sands in freedom still. He had as many pranks as a kitten, but "Attention!" sobered him down at once, and when the men were on parade no sergeant was more important than he. His sides shone like satin, and great was his pride in the glittering trappings that bedecked him.

There came a sudden call to arms in the middle of that golden summer. It puzzled Dennikins that no one noticed him—even Sunshine Smith, whose eyes were not laughing now, pushed him gently down when he stood on his hind-legs with a fore-foot on each of his shoulders.

"Time for play's over, old boy," he said. And though he and

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the other men would have taken their mascot with them, the colonel decided he must be left behind.

Sunshine Smith, greatly troubled, did his best to find a good home for him, but his plans went wrong, and through sheer mischance the petted donkey was left behind when the last of his friends had gone. He was sold to the first man who made a bid for him, to sell him for double next day.

Then came three sad years for General Dennikins. He was overworked by a man who sold coals in pennyworths down the back streets; passed on to a rag-and-bone merchant who half-starved him, and then to a gang of gipsies. They fed him well enough by fits and starts, helping themselves to oats and beans and chaff when they went by a farm at dusk, but they beat him unmercifully with a knotted stick when he did not go fast enough to please them. He was even more wretched than his patient mother had been, though this is saying a great deal; for no lively little foal frisked by *his* side to ask him why he didn't hurry, or lay by his side at night.

The months went on. His masters earned little, for though the cart he dragged was loaded high with iron saucepans and brooms and brushes, and sometimes logs of wood, the farm folk were shy of dealing with gipsies. Wherever these went fowls mysteriously vanished; so did fat little pigs and pheasants, to say nothing of fine young hares.

Amos Gates, whose master's coverts had been badly robbed, was loud in his wrath against them.

"I'll set a trap for they poachers," he declared, "an' ketch 'em red-handed"—which he did. The caravan was seized, and General Dennikins, cart and all, was sold next week in the market.

Michael Horder bought him. Mike had enlisted when the war broke out, when he was barely sixteen. The recruiting sergeant

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winked when he gave his age as eighteen, for he had been a fine grown lad. He had come back, much the worse for wear, to find his old grandparents dead and buried, and their ramshackle cottage pulled down. His place in the town had been kept for him, but his head for figures was gone.

"Mike, he wur never speshull spry," said Abe Jessop, up at the mill, "but what wits he hed hes bin scared away by thet shell as sent him spinnin'."

Mike had been lounging round the market-place when "one white donkey, one cart, and contents thereof" were sold by auction.

"White, do they call you?" he said to the poor beast, fondling his shaggy head. He might well smile, for 'dingy grey' would have better described poor Dennikins.

"Not my fault," said his sad brown eyes, and he moved a step closer to the shabby figure, as if asking dumbly for protection.

"We're both down-and-outers," Mike said bitterly. "Haven't been treated fair, eh?" Then a bright idea struck him. He had a few pounds left—why shouldn't he buy the donkey and the cart, and try his luck as a hawker?

"Better than begging, anyway!" he thought. So Dennikins found a new master.

He was happy again now, for Mike was kind, and that was what mattered most. He worked too hard to grow plump and sleek, but he held up his head as he used to do, and stepped out with a willing heart. Mike was offered twice what he had paid for him, but refused it; he liked him too well.

"We're doing fine!" he said more than once, and Dennikins hee-hawed "Why not?"

Mike had to lay in a new stock soon, for he and "Mokey" were growing quite popular, and had regular customers now. The donkey made friends wherever he went, and stopped of his

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own accord at each cottage where dainties had been forthcoming. Once he actually lifted the latch of a door where he had been regaled with apples, and thrust in his nose as a gentle hint that he was ready for more. "He's as clever as you make them," Mike said proudly. He too was holding up his head again, for the open-air life was suiting him, and his head had begun to clear.

But bad times came when the summer had gone, and the country lanes were so flooded with rain that the cart stuck fast in the mire. Mike tried to sell his wares in the towns, but week by week he found it harder. Then he fell ill; he was in bed for a month, and his savings dwindled away. He must get on the road again at once, or it would mean the workhouse.

"Come along, Mokey—we've got to do it somehow," he said when he'd dragged himself round to the shed where Dennikins had been boarded out. And "Mokey" welcomed him with a feeble attempt at the song and dance which in happier times had been the pride of the regiment.

It was about the worst possible day for a sick man to start hawking in the streets again. A horrible mixture of rain and sleet came with each gust of chill north wind, and Mike's teeth were chattering as he called "Pots and pans! Who'll buy? Who'll buy?" Doors were slammed in his face if he ventured to knock, and a policeman urged him to move on when a woman tried to bargain with him for a saucepan at half-price. Mike was sick with hunger, and would have let her have it; but when the policeman appeared on the scene she too slammed the door in his face.

Dennikins turned his head over his shoulder to rub it against Mike's sleeve. "Better luck next time," he tried to say, and Mike of course understood.

"Good old moke!" he sighed, leaning against him for support, for his legs had given at the knees. Would they carry him on a

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bit farther, he wondered? He must get some food somehow. What a big mistake it had been to dispute about that saucepan!

"Move on," said the same policeman again and Mike drew himself up in a hurry.

It was well that he did, for at that very moment Mokey tried to stand on his hind-legs.

"*Hee-haw! Hee-haw! Hee-haw!*" he brayed joyously; and a man in khaki, with an empty sleeve, stopped suddenly, then crossed the road.

"Well, I'll be shot if it isn't the General!" he exclaimed.

"*Hee-haw!*" the donkey brayed again, and tipping the cartful of saucepans over, he put a fore-foot on each of the soldier's shoulders and licked the top of his nose.

Before the policeman had sufficiently recovered from his surprise to say "Move on!" once more, a crowd had collected. It raised a cheer as Dennikins, on four legs again, attempted his song and dance.

"Knowed him before," they repeated to each other, having caught what Smith said to Mike. Then they helped to collect the scattered saucepans, and the man in blue looked the other way and put nobody under arrest.

In rather less than ten minutes General Dennikins was being rubbed down in a warm stable by his old friend, who stopped now and then to pat him and say, "Glad to see you again, old chap!" In a few minutes more he was munching carrots, with a fine feast of oats to follow, while before a roaring fire in a private room the two men were eating good roast beef.

And that was the beginning of the brighter times of which Mike had almost lost hope. He went back to the country with Sunshine Smith, and is partner now on his poultry farm, where a hen would hide her head in shame if four days out of six she didn't

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lay an egg—and an extra large size at that. General Dennikins, sleek as of yore, his coat polished smooth as satin, takes the eggs to the station three times a week, but by far the most important thing he does is to carry the young Sunshine Smiths to school.

This is a happy-ever-after story, for even if Dennikins lives to be thirty—as I have heard say some donkeys do—I know he will always be loved and cared for, and treated as a faithful friend.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CON

“UNCLE NEIL says he’ll bring you *any* kind of pet!” said Nancy, reading over her brother’s shoulder. “Oh, Caspar, do choose a big retriever! We’d play at being rescued. I’d push you in the pond, and then he could plunge in and save you. It would be such fun to see Grannie’s face when he carried you in to her all dripping.”

But Caspar shook his head.

“It’s awfully good of Uncle Neil,” he said, “but I don’t think I want a pet at all. There’ll never be another dog like Peter.”

Nancy’s round face sobered as she turned away. For Peter—poor Peter!—a spry Scotch terrier, had met a sad fate some weeks ago, when he had disputed the right of way with a car in a narrow lane. Caspar missed him dreadfully. They had been such friends; and now his kennel was empty.

Grandmother quite agreed that a new dog would never do. “A nice white rabbit would be best, I think,” she wrote to her favourite son. “Boys always like rabbits, and it will amuse him to see about building a hutch. Get an Angora if you can, and one is enough to begin with. I remember you used to say long ago that they were particularly friendly.”

Uncle Neil obeyed orders, and when next he came he brought with him the finest specimen of a young Angora that he had been able to find.

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"I call him Con," he told Caspar, his dark eyes twinkling, "after Confucius, a famous man who lived in China five hundred years before Christ, and wrote about rabbits then. I don't suppose he ever saw such a fine one as his namesake, though. Hi, Con! Come here, old fellow. That's right. See how tame he is, Caspar—he'll go with you anywhere. The lad who bred him took him out for walks when he was sure there were no cats about. He wouldn't have sold him, but he was going to live in London, and he knew that Con wouldn't like that."

The hutch Caspar built, with Phil Tomkins to help him, was quite a splendid affair; it had plenty of room for Con and a companion, when the time came for him to have one. It was placed in the warmest corner of the yard, where it would be sheltered from the wind, and blocks of wood raised it well off the ground so that it might not be damp. A bundle of fresh hay made Con a cosy bed, and the floor was sprinkled thickly with sawdust. Fine ashes or sand would do as well, said Tomkins. The great thing was to keep the hutch clean and dry. It must be cleaned out every morning.

"You'll have to see to this yourself, and to his feeding too if you want him to keep all right. And just don't you believe it if people tell you that rabbits can do without water! They mayn't need much, as there's moisture in their food, but it should be there in case they want it. Does are particularly thirsty when they've young ones, and it's jolly cruel to forget this and leave them with an empty basin. Hallo—what's that you're giving Con to eat? A cabbage leaf? No wonder he turns up his nose at it! A limp, faded thing like that! You'll have him sick if you don't look out—the greenstuff you give a rabbit must be crisp and fresh. He's naturally a dainty feeder.

"Cabbage and turnip tops, lettuce and parsnips and dandelion



BUILDING THE RABBIT-HUTCH

leaves are all good for him; dandelion roots he'll like too, and carrots. Don't give him too many of these, by the way, or he may get a pain in his middle.

"When you keep young ones, you'll find that at six weeks old they'll be able to feed themselves, and then you should give them a little bran mixed with hot milk and water. You needn't put more than a dash of milk, you know, if your people make a fuss about it, and be sure you don't make the mixture too sloppy; it should be a thickish paste. Let them have this three times a day, and fresh vegetables now and then.

"At six months old—Con's about that now—a rabbit's food should be more dry than moist, remember. A little oatmeal is good for him; Smith Major mixes this with tea-leaves, and says that his rabbits are very fond of it. When greenstuff is scarce give him steamed or baked potatoes, and cabbage-stumps, grass, and clover."

Caspar listened politely. Most of this he'd heard already, but once you started Tomkins talking you had to let him go on. He had lots to say of the different kinds of rabbit from which Caspar might choose when he added to his stock, though he quite agreed with Uncle Neil that Angoras were hard to beat. There were Belgian Hares, he said, which had nothing to do with hares, though they looked rather like them, and jolly little Dutch rabbits—black-and-white or blue-and-white—and Himalayans, also black-and-white, but quite differently marked from the Dutch ones. Himalayans, he added, had pink eyes and black ears, and black noses and feet and tails. Like the Dutch ones, they were "hardy little beggars," but had to be kept out of draughts.

"I like Flemish Giants myself," he continued, sampling an apple he had shaken from a tree. "They're the biggest fancy rabbits we get over here—one of mine weighs over twelve pounds.

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They need much larger hutches than the others, naturally, and even when they are full grown they should have three good meals a day. I start 'em in the morning with a mash of ground oats, barley meal, and middlings, well mixed together and scalded with boiling water. In the middle of the day they have greenstuff of some kind—swedes do them grandly in winter—and for supper bread-and-milk or good sound oats. If Con doesn't seem up to the mark at any time, and is off his food, try him with bread-and-milk—warm, you know. It'll cheer him up."

"Con must be let out for a run at least once a day," Uncle Neil declared the next time he came down, "for rabbits are such active little animals that it is wicked to keep them shut up all day. But don't forget to take a look round first to see there are none of his enemies about! In the winter he might run up and down the passages in the house—he'll enjoy a game of hide-and-seek—and until then turn him loose in the garden when you can spare half an hour to watch that he doesn't get into mischief. That's a first-rate hutch you have built for him, but the door doesn't seem as secure as it should be. You'd better take a look at it."

"I will," said Caspar; but he never did. It went right out of his head.

It seemed to him that every day Con grew more interesting. He had such pretty little ways, and even Nancy allowed he was handsome as he sat in the sunshine nibbling a cabbage leaf a week or two after his arrival. The long hairs of his coat glistened like fine spun silk, and his eyes gleamed like lustrous gems when Caspar offered him a carrot.

"But rabbits *are* stupid," she remarked, when not even by a lettuce from her very own garden would he be cajoled into standing on his hind-legs.

CON

"They're *not*," said Caspar. "You're stupid yourself, or you wouldn't say such a thing."

"Am I, indeed?" cried the indignant Nancy. "You're the rudest—." But before she could say any more, their cousin Nona came; and somehow nobody liked to say cross things when she was there.

Con left the remains of Nancy's lettuce to flop across the lawn and sniff at Nona's ankles, which was his way of welcoming her. She was carrying a basket filled with blackberries, and Caspar's mouth watered at the sight.

"There are heaps more ripe in the glen," she said, as she put down her basket to pick up Con, lifting him gently by the loose skin round his neck while she supported him by placing her other hand under him. "I've thought of such a lovely plan. We'll picnic there this afternoon, and get all we can to make jam for those kiddies in the hospital. Mother says we can make it ourselves."

"Scrumptious!" cried Caspar and Nancy, speaking both together. (If you make jam, you have to taste it, you know—or how could you tell it was just right?)

The children thought that particular picnic the nicest they had had that year. The sun was so golden and the air so sweet, and the gay little breeze that swept down from the hills caught the crimson leaves of the maples on its wings and changed them into bright-hued birds. And Aunt May's biscuits were so crisp and brown, and the cookies quite delicious, thought Caspar. As he finished the last, he caught a glimpse of two points of light in the long grass facing him. They vanished instantly, but not before he had seen that they belonged to a reddish-brown animal with a small pointed head and a long curved body.

"A weasel!" he cried. "He was licking his lips. I believe he's been down a rabbit hole!"

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“ Oh, I hope not! ” sighed Nona. “ I do wish the wood-folk would not kill each other! Rabbits don’t, of course, nor do the gentle hares, but stoats and weasels are just dreadful.”

“ I’m glad Con has such a safe hutch to sleep in,” said Caspar. “ Nona, are the rabbits here any relation to him? I never thought of it until this minute.”

“ Why, of course. Fancy rabbits are descended from the short-eared, small-bodied wild ones, though you might not think it to look at them. These are their poor relations, as it were. When flowers are transplanted from fields and hedges and grown in gardens, where the soil is richer, they become quite different too. Those big velvet pansies you’re so fond of, Nancy, came originally from blooms not much bigger than sixpence, and Mother’s pet roses—the damask ones that carried off the prize at the last county flower show—came from little wild briar ones, just as sweet and lovely in their own way. Well, when rabbits were tamed and kept safe from all their enemies, with food always at hand without having to hunt for it, they became different too. The strongest and prettiest from among them were chosen to be fathers and mothers, and the baby rabbits most like their parents were presently allowed to have young ones. In time there came to be any number of varieties, for rabbits are bred in many lands, and in each country the boys and girls who kept them chose in this way whether their pets should be long-haired or short-haired, and what sort of ears they should have.

“ Nobody knows when wild rabbits first came to England. People used to think the Romans brought them, but discoveries have been made which show us that they were here long before the Romans came. Hundreds and hundreds of years ago there was land in many parts of the world that to-day are covered by sea, and some people think that rabbits found their way here from North

America when there was no Atlantic Ocean, and Great Britain—it hadn't that name then—was joined on to the rest of Europe. It must have taken hundreds of years, and millions of rabbits to get here. I suppose the little things would wander on from one place to another when food grew scarce, as all free animals do to-day.

"Rabbits love sandy banks covered with gorse or heather for their homes, since sand is easy to tunnel. There's a warren in the bank just opposite us. If we keep very quiet and don't make a sound perhaps some of the rabbits will come out."

It was very warm still in the golden sunshine, though the mornings and evenings were cold. Caspar had finished the cakes now, and it didn't seem nearly so hard as usual to stay still. Indeed, his eyes were almost closed when Nona whispered: "There they are! *Hssh-sssh!* Aren't they *darlings!*"

Three little furry things had popped out their heads to see if the trespassers in their glen had disappeared. Nona and Caspar did not move, and Nancy was by this time fast asleep, her head pillowed on Nona's lap.

"All safe!" the wee bunnies signalled mysteriously, and out came several more. After a minute or two they began to play, jumping over each other among the clumps of bracken and racing from tree to tree. When the littlest one tumbled head over heels, Caspar couldn't resist a small chuckle. At the sound of this the baby rabbits vanished as quickly as the weasel had done. They felt safe in the fastnesses of their burrow.

"There are wonderful galleries down below," said Nona. "When John was home from school last summer he dug up part of a warren to see what it was really like. It had as many twists and turns as a maze, and he thought that the rabbits had made these on purpose, so that if an enemy ventured down he would very likely lose his way. There were numbers of 'bolt-holes,' as

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they are called, which led out to different parts of the bank; these give the rabbits more chance of escape if a stoat or a weasel gets in.

“The mother-rabbits—does, you know—hollow out brood-chambers a few feet below the ground, and make soft beds of the white down on their own breasts for their babies to lie on. Such funny little things they are when they’re born, Caspar, for their eyes are tightly shut and they’ve not a scrap of hair. They’re quite helpless, too. They’d be gobbled up quick if they were not so safely hidden.

“Tame rabbits also pluck the down from their own breasts, and roll their babies in it, one by one, directly they are born. A lady told me the other day how when she first began to keep rabbits she did not know about this, and seeing a heap of white fluff in a corner of the hutch, thought the doe’s babies had come in the night, and that she had eaten them! So she cleared away the ‘fluff’; and the poor little mother-rabbit had to strip her breast quite bare to get more down—for, whatever happened, those young ones of hers were not going to be bare and cold!

“Baby rabbits must be left entirely to their mother for the first few weeks. Their father should be kept in a separate hutch, for he might interfere with them; and one should not go near too often while they are very young lest their mother should kill them. She is very jealous and does not like them to be handled.”

“What happens to baby hares?” inquired Caspar. “Father says hares haven’t any burrows, but make their ‘forms’ just anywhere they fancy—among the heather or behind some largish stone, or in a little hollow.”

“Baby hares, or leverets, are quite different from baby rabbits,” explained Nona, “and don’t need the same protection. Their eyes are open straight away, and they come into the world with their nice brown coats on, all ready to jump and play. From the

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moment they are born their mother teaches them when to run for their lives, and when to lie quite still and pretend they are part of the ground. They are clever little creatures, and most affectionate when caught quite young and tamed.

“ William Cowper, the poet, made a great pet of one. He called him ‘ Puss,’ and when Puss was ill took him away from his other tame hares and nursed him until he was well again. Puss was so grateful for his care that he licked his hand, first on the back and then inside it, and then every finger separately. He only did this once again, another time when he had been ill.

“ After breakfast Cowper used to take him to the garden. This he always enjoyed, and when the poet was reading or writing Puss would come up to him and drum on his knee to invite him to go for a run. If he took no notice, Puss would take a piece of his master’s coat and pull and pull until he got up and followed him into the garden.

“ He was so tame that he seemed much happier with his master than with companions of his own kind. That’s often the way with pet animals—when we really love them and try to make them happy. They trust us so, which is why it’s so dreadful of us to forget to look after them properly.”

Caspar wondered if Nona knew that he had forgotten to give Con his supper one night when a tiresome sum wouldn’t come right.

“ It was only that once,” he began, but Nancy just then sat up. She was rather cross, because something creepy had found its way into her shoe.

“ Nona,” she said, “ don’t *you* think rabbits stupid? I wanted Caspar to have a dog, but he wouldn’t because of Peter.”

Caspar flushed. Even yet a lump came in his throat when he thought of the dear old shaggy head that had so often rested on his knee. Nona patted his shoulder.

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“ I should feel just the same,” she said to Nancy. “ And rabbits are *not* stupid—no animals are, and there’s just as much difference between those of the same kind as there is between children. Some are always brighter than others.

“ Of course,” she went on as they strolled down the glen, “ you mustn’t expect tame rabbits like Con, who never have to think where to hunt for food, or how to hide from hawks and stoats and weasels, to be as bright as those wild ones we’ve been watching, who are always on the look-out. The fathers and mothers—the bucks and does—make drumming noises with their feet the moment they hear a suspicious sound, or catch the scent of an enemy, when the baby bunnies are playing. And the little things scuttle back quick as quick, as we saw. They wouldn’t dare to wait a second.

“ Some of the old bucks are very fierce when anything happens to annoy them. I once heard of a little white fox-terrier who loved scrunched rabbit for tea. Whenever he could, he slunk away from his master and nipped down a rabbit hole. Then he’d flatten himself out, and when he could go no farther, lie in wait to pounce on a young one. He’d come up presently looking very pleased, and that night he never wanted any supper.

“ One day he had a narrow escape. When he tried to get out by the way he had come, he found the hole blocked with earth. His master, who had followed him, arrived just in time to see him struggle through, panting for breath and nearly suffocated. The old bucks, he thought, must have dug him in, since the tunnels in that warren had very firm walls, which were not likely to have fallen. The bucks could easily have done this by leaving the warren through one of their bolt-holes, and then working at the hole from the outside. Of course, this is only guesswork, but I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if it were true.”

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Caspar hurried to the garden when they got back to take Con a tuft of meadow-grass, which Nona said he would be sure to like. The hutch was empty. The unfastened door showed how Con had made his escape.

“He’s sure to be somewhere in the garden,” Nona comforted. “He’s too fond of you to run away.” But she was obliged to go home before they’d found him, and Caspar was in despair.

Nancy helped him to hunt every inch of the ground, calling “Con! Con! Con!” as eagerly as he as they peeped under every bush. It began to grow dark. Caspar thought of the fox whose trail the hounds had lost last week, and his voice was quite husky as he said: “Nancy, could he have gone into the wood?”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” Nancy began, when something pushed open the door of the tool-shed. It was Con, who had spent a happy afternoon. He had eaten the heart of a fine cabbage the gardener had cut for his own Sunday dinner and left on the top of his coat.

That night Con’s hutch was fastened up with a very strong piece of string, and Caspar was down early next morning to mend the latch before he went to school.

CHAPTER NINE

THE BIRTHDAY PRESENTS

BABS woke very early on her birthday morning. The birds were twittering outside her window, and in the lilac-bush by the porch a thrush was singing a loud "Good morning" to the little pink clouds in the sky.

"I wish it weren't unkind to keep birds in cages," Babs thought drowsily as she snuggled down and tried to go to sleep again. (Birthdays did not really begin till seven, when Mother came in to say "Happy returns!") "I'd love to have one of my very own, with a musical box in its throat."

I think she must have been right away to Dreamland, for when next she stirred the room was full of sunshine, and some one was opening the door. Yes—it *was* Mother, with the beautifullest little silver brush, and a comb and a silver mirror. The birthday had begun.

Jimmie rushed in presently, only half dressed, to show his new boxing-gloves and a bat; his birthday was really not until next week, but he always kept it with hers.

"Can't stay," he said, trying to run off with her comb. He was afraid that he would be late for breakfast, and Fairy Godmother's presents would be waiting on the table beside their plates.

But this year Jimmie's was on the bookcase—a longish box covered with a sheet of paper—while in the window, under a square of baize, hung the richly gilt cage of a canary.

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"He's for you, Babs," said Mother, removing the green baize, and Goldenobs lifted his wee yellow head and sang with the loveliest runs and trills.

"*Just* what I wanted!" cried Babs, as usual; and "Just what *I* wanted!" cried Jimmie. For the longish box turned out to be a cage that held two delightful dormice.

"If the cat is shut up you can let them out," said Fairy Godmother, who had just looked in. (Her real name was Aunt Ethel, but Jimmie and Babs called her Fairy Godmother because she always found exactly the right sort of presents.)

"Slimtail is rather shy," she went on. "Being the lady, this is quite correct. But Dormey is a bold little fellow. He will make friends at once."

And the very minute the cage was opened he scampered round to all the family in turn, running up their sleeves and springing to their shoulders, as if quite sure of a welcome. Jimmie offered him a nut, provided by Fairy Godmother, and Dormey nibbled it daintily, first rasping off the rough inner skin with those sharp little teeth of his. His paws were exactly like hands, thought Babs, as she watched the tiny sensitive fingers so tightly clasped round his treasure.

"I once found the nest of a dormouse," said Fairy Godmother as they took her to see a bed of bluebells that looked like a piece of a summer sky dropped into the heart of the wood. "It was in a thicket of blackberries, and at first I thought it belonged to a wren. Looking closer, however—I had to stand on tiptoe, for the hedge was very high—I saw that it was made of grass and leaves and fibre, and the wren, you know, uses moss. These were cunningly woven in and out to make the cosiest little home. The leaves were placed flatly on the inside, to keep out the wind and rain, and the entrance was hidden by stalks of grass so

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cleverly arranged that when brushed aside they always sprang back into place. The nest was lined with wood-grass, nibbled very fine; this was to be the young ones' bed.

"A lady I know found the nest of a dormouse between two forked boughs in a maple, and guessing from the weight of it that it was full, took it just as it was and wrapped it in her handkerchief. Soon the mother dormouse peeped out to see who had dared to carry it off. She looked quite fierce, for her babies had been asleep, and now they'd be clamouring for food.

"The lady put her gently on the ground to see what she would do. Instead of making her escape, as she might easily have done, the brave little thing ran up her skirt to defend the two small mousies that were still in the handkerchief.

" 'I'm not going to hurt you, wee thing,' said my friend, and put the nest exactly where she'd found it, with the mother and her babies inside. She went back next day to pay them a visit, but that nest had completely vanished. Mrs Dormouse had removed it, bit by bit, to some other place she thought was safer.

"It is sure to have been near a blackberry-bush. for until the young dormice are able to eat nuts their parents feed them on blackberry fruit and juice. When they are born, which is generally about September, Mr Dormouse makes a little nest for himself close by, where he can keep an eye on his family without having his rest disturbed.

"Dormice sleep all through the winter, you know, so directly the weather begins to get really cold they go off by themselves to some sheltered hollow, where each makes a little oval nest of roots and fibre, cleverly cemented together with clay. Then they curl themselves round, and don't wake until the spring sunshine wakes them."

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“What shall I give mine to eat besides nuts?” asked Jimmie, with a little wriggle. Dormey was running up and down his sleeve, and he had always been ticklish.

“All animals in captivity should have as much variety in their food as possible, just as they do when they are free. You’ll find they’ll enjoy a little grain, and a taste of sweet ripe fruit, especially blackberries. Every day you should give them some bread-and-milk. When they’ve eaten all they want, take the dish away. Stale food is sure to upset them.

“They won’t sleep right through the winter when they’re caged, but they will be very drowsy, and only wake up now and then. Their nesting-box, warmly lined, will be their refuge instead of a snug little hollow, and, once they go there, they should not be disturbed.

“Of course you will keep their cage very clean, and don’t ever be persuaded to use a revolving wheel. It’s as cruel for dormice as for squirrels.”

The bluebells had been left behind them now, and the children were back in the library. Goldenobs was pecking anxiously at his cage door as though he were trying to open it.

“The friend who bred him always let him out about this time every morning,” said Fairy Godmother, “and even if the window is open there’s no fear that he will fly away. You open the door, Babs, when you’ve talked to him a little. I want him to know your voice.”

Babs told him that he was “a dear and a sweet,” and he echoed *tweet-tweet-tweet*, as if he quite agreed. Then she lifted the latch and moved quietly away to see what he would do.

There was a swift flutter of yellow wings, and Goldenobs had perched on the clock. He flew from this all round the room, taking notice of everything. Babs called him softly, and he came

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to her at once to peck at the glistening lump of sugar she held in her outstretched hand.

"He loves sugar, but he mustn't have too much of it," said Fairy Godmother. "Canaries need careful feeding. Be sure you give him the right kind of seed, and don't buy it ready mixed, but in separate packets. In this way you get a better quality. He'll want two parts of canary-seed to one of rape-seed, with half a dozen hemp-seeds—certainly not more—now and then as a special treat. When he is moulting he might have a dozen; they are very stimulating, and will help him to grow his new feathers quickly. A few drops of sulphate of iron in his drinking-water once or twice a week will also be good for him then.

"Always give him plenty of clean fresh water, and keep his seed-vessels full. A doll's saucerful of hard-boiled yolk of egg, smoothly grated and mixed with crumbs of an Osborne biscuit, will be another treat for him twice a week. Let him have it oftener when he's moulting. And he'll enjoy a grape, or a scrap of sweet apple. He should have something green every day: groundsel, or chickweed, or a lettuce leaf, or a morsel of cabbage, or watercress."

"I won't forget," said Babs, her eyes shining. "Tell me what else to do."

"You must always keep his cage very clean, or he'll be infested with red mites. Once a month it should be plunged into a solution of carbolic acid and water, and thoroughly dried before he's put back. The perches—you'll notice that he has three—must be scrubbed at least once a week; it's a good plan to have a second set of these, for damp perches would give him rheumatism. The tray at the bottom of his cage must be kept clean too; scrape it every morning, and then sprinkle it well with sand.

"But this isn't all that you must do for him. Though canaries

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are born and bred in captivity—this is why they are the only song-birds it is not cruel to keep confined—you must remember that his native land is the Canary Islands, where the air is always soft and warm. So his cage must be hung in a sunny window, out of the way of draughts, and in the winter, or on chilly days, he must never be left in a room without a fire.

“You’ll love to see him taking his bath. Put a square of oil-cloth on the floor, with the saucer of a good-sized flower-pot in the middle. To-day, since the sun is shining in on him, he can have cold water to splash in, but in winter the chill should be taken off.”

Goldenobs loved his bath that morning. When he had finished, he perched on the edge of it to preen his feathers, and then flew off to the mantelshelf.

“He wants to see if he’s tidy!” cried Babs. And he must have been pleased with what he saw, for he sang so loudly that it almost seemed as if his throat would burst.

That evening after dinner—Jimmie and Babs always sat up quite late on birthdays—Daddy told them about a canary who belonged to the crew of the *Reuben*. Her cage used to hang suspended from the bridge, and the sailors made a great pet of her.

“One morning,” went on Daddy, “when they were in port, her cage was found empty, and the ship was searched to discover where she could have hidden. She was much too tame to have flown away, and the cat was beyond reproach.

“At last a young sailor noticed something yellow fluttering on the crest of a wave. Without waiting a moment, though fully dressed, he took a header into the water and swam to the rescue of their pet.

“The little thing was none the worse for her adventure when she had been dried and warmed before the fire, all the rest of the

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crew crowding round, and though I don't suppose she sang as well as Goldenobs, I'm sure she did her best to thank her friend for having risked his life to save her."

"Do you really suppose she knew?" asked Babs seriously, and Daddy laughed.

"Perhaps not exactly, but birds are very clever, and anyhow he would know that it was he who brought her out of that cold green water that had such a nasty taste. Once upon a time——"

But they never heard that story, for the post had come, and Jimmie and Babs flew to cut the strings of some brown paper parcels.

CHAPTER TEN

MR SQUIRRIE

BEES hummed in and out of the lavender bushes, and a butterfly, purple and blue and green, hovered over a rose that peeped in at the window, the sunshine glinting on its wings. From Molly's couch by the open window she could see in the lilac-bush a mother thrush trying to coax her babies to fly.

"Come-come-come!" the little brown bird chirped encouragingly, alighting on a bough some distance from the nest. "This way, my pretty ones! Don't be afraid!" And first one, then another and another obeyed, twittering with pride as they landed beside her. The littlest one was afraid to stir; Molly could hear its cries of distress as the mother thrush flew still farther away, followed by the other three.

"I guess it feels as lonesome as I do," she thought. "It's Little-left-behind, like me."

There were tears in her eyes just ready to brim over when Roger came marching in.

He had not seen her since the day she had fallen out of the swing, and he wanted to tell her how sorry he was that she'd hurt her back and must lie quite still until it got well again. But he didn't know how—so he said instead: "Hullo! How jolly you look up here! It's ripping to be close up to the window so's you can see the garden."

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"I don't *want* to see the garden," said Molly perversely. "I want to go off to the woods with the others; they're going to be out all day."

"Well, I've brought you something you'll like," said Roger, undoing the top button of his rough tweed jacket. Out popped a saucy little red-brown head, with two bright eyes that were full of mischief as they glanced quickly round the room. Next moment a squirrel leapt from Roger's arm to the edge of Molly's couch, where he hovered, ready for instant flight if she showed any sign of moving.

Molly lay quite still—she'd seen Squirrie before, when he was just a ball of silky down with sharp wee white teeth that bit you. The wind had blown him out of his nest one wild gusty morning in March; his ears were unfeathered, he could only just see, and his tail was the merest apology for one. Roger had found him and brought him home; he fed him with warm milk and water hour by hour, and presently Squirrie revived. Soon he could manage to eat grated nuts, and at sixteen months old was the joy of his master's heart. And now he was giving him to Molly.

"Oh, Roger, you don't mean that I'm to keep him!" she cried, as Squirrie, deciding that he rather liked her, ran to her shoulder to nibble at her hair.

"That's it," said Roger, and for fear that she would thank him he went on talking very quickly.

"Squirrels are top-hole little beasts," he said, "but if you want to make pets of them you've got to start when they're quite young, as I did with Squirrie, or they're pretty sure to die on your hands. And unless they are tame they're no good at all—only a softie would think it fun to keep one cooped up in a cage. Squirrie only uses his to sleep in. I've got it downstairs. I wanted to surprise you, so I didn't bring it up with me."

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"It's the loveliest surprise I've ever had!" said Molly. And while Squirrie explored the wardrobe and the bookshelves, packing the nuts with which Roger supplied him into any place he could find, Molly heard how she was to feed him.

"It won't do to give him only bread-and-milk," Roger told her, "though he likes it now and then so long as it isn't sloppy. Pour just enough milk-and-water on the bread to soak in, without leaving any over. When he's eaten all he wants, take the dish away, and don't let him have the leavings.

"Nuts you'll give him, of course. They're his natural food. Filberts are best for him, or brazils, but monkey nuts will do at a pinch. When there's any fruit going he'd like to share it—apples, pears, grapes, bananas—he's keen on them all, and dates too when he can get them. He likes carrots and greens and maize and oats. Father says that one reason why Squirrie has done so well is that he has such a mixed diet. He'd eat all sorts of things if he were wild, you know, and so he should have them now.

"I don't shut him up at all in the day—he goes wherever he likes. If he wants to come in, and the window is shut, he taps on the glass, and gets quite annoyed if some one doesn't open it at once. One day when, to see what he would do, I pretended I didn't hear, he scampered off after a minute or two. I thought perhaps he'd gone to the woods, and could have punched my silly head.

"'He'll come back when he's hungry,' said Father, and he was right. For when I went upstairs to brush my hair for dinner, down the chimney plopped Squirrie, as black as soot! And what d'you think he did next? Why, raced downstairs before I could catch him and ran up Daddy's sleeve on to his shoulder! Daddy wasn't a bit pleased, but Squirrie seemed to think it the greatest fun when Daddy had to go upstairs and change his collar."

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“Tell me what else he did,” said Molly, speaking very softly, for Squirrie was busy hiding nuts in the soft brown masses of her hair.

“Well, when Father’s sister, my Aunt Jane, stayed with us in the spring, Squirrie was always running about her room. Directly he’d had his breakfast off he’d go, ready to slip in behind the housemaid who took up her morning tea.

“Aunt Jane was a sport, and rather liked him, though once when he bit her—it was only in fun—she insisted on going to the doctor to have her finger cauterized in case it gave her hydrophobia. (He doesn’t bite now unless you take him unawares, and then it’s because he’s startled.) After this she would as soon he kept downstairs, but Squirrie wouldn’t do this.

“Presently she began to miss things—handkerchiefs and gloves, and wool from her work-basket. Anna—that’s the housemaid—was very vexed, for she didn’t know where they could have gone. Then Aunt Jane lost a little lace collar that had belonged to her mother, and a diamond brooch and a hair-net. There was a great fuss, and Anna cried. And Mother went to the spare room to help Aunt Jane turn out all the drawers and make sure the things weren’t tucked away.

“They had hunted everywhere, when Mother heard a little rustling sound, and looked up to see the tip of Squirrie’s tail above the ledge at the top of the wardrobe. ‘Now, what is he doing there?’ she thought, and told Anna to bring a high chair from the nursery, so that she might look and see.

“And there was Squirrie in a pile of handkerchiefs and gloves and things! He had taken it into his head that he’d like to build a nest, and had helped himself to what was handy. The handkerchiefs and gloves were torn into ribbons, but luckily he’d rolled the collar into a ball, and had not begun to tear that yet. The

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diamond brooch must have been caught in it. They found it there too. I had to keep Squirrie shut up until Aunt Jane went, and he never tried to build a nest again.

"Now I'll show you his cage. It's a jolly nice one. I made every bit of it myself."

It was four feet square, of wood about one inch in thickness, with wire netting in front and across the top. In one corner under the roof was a sleeping-box, about a foot square, filled with clean fresh hay; the branch of a tree sloped upward to it from the floor, which was thickly covered with sawdust. Roger said that this must be raked over every day.

"I scrub the cage out every week," he added, "with boiling water and soda and strong disinfectant soap. When it's dry—and remember not to put it near the fire or the wood will warp—I sprinkle it well with sawdust made very hot in the oven, as this helps to dry the wood. If Squirrie went back to the cage while it was damp, most likely he'd get a bad cold."

"How should I have tamed him if you hadn't first?" asked Molly, watching him trying to crack the little bone knob on the blind-cord.

"That depends on his age. If he'd been just a baby he would have grown used to you almost at once; it would have taken longer if he had been bigger. But first you would have put your hand in his cage and stroked him, and talked to him very softly, and then you'd have let him eat out of your hand, and then, when he knew you and wasn't afraid, some time when you were sure that the coast was clear, you'd have let him out for a run. You could easily have tempted him back to his cage by putting something in his bowl that he particularly liked. Squirrels are easy to tame when they're young, but one that isn't captured until he is full grown will never really forgive you."

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“Uncle Egbert got me a squirrel when I was small. The dealer he bought him from praised him up no end, and said how gentle and tame he was; but that was because they had drawn all his teeth—yes, wasn’t it *frightfully* cruel? When we found it out, I wanted to let him go; but he would have starved, as he could only eat soft things. So we kept him, but he died quite soon. Father said that his heart was broken.”

“I’ll make Squirrie very happy,” promised Molly softly. And she did, though I think that on bright spring days, when the song of the wind came down the chimney, and the rooks were cawing in the beeches, he must have longed to be off to the woods and build himself a cosy nest.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE PRIDE OF THE VALLEY

“AND I’ve got to stay behind!” said Roger glumly.

“Just so,” said his father. “You’re on outpost duty. But it won’t be so long before you go to Wellington. The days will fly quickly then.”

“I shall miss you frightfully,” Roger went on, determined not to be comforted. His father nodded and smiled.

“We’ve been great chums, haven’t we?” he remarked. “Your aunt says I lead you into mischief, but we’ve had some jolly good times.”

“It’s been ripping,” said Roger, “your being home on leave; but that makes it worse now it’s over. And India is such a long way off. It was bad enough when you were in France. Aunt Grace jumped every time she heard a knock—even Greta and Nancy noticed.”

“But that was in war-time, and queer things happen then. By the way, I’m expecting a friend by the next train. It’s about time we started to meet him.”

“A *friend*!” cried Roger in a disgusted voice. “And this is your very last week!”

“A friend,” said the Colonel, “and I think you’ll be glad to see him. I say, old fellow, don’t grouse! We must keep a stiff upper lip, you and I, even if we do feel a bit down.”

“Sorry!” mumbled Roger. It was all he could do not to add that it was “jolly hard lines.”

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No one had such a father, he thought, as he scanned the tall figure beside him. Colonel Denham had won his blue at Oxford long ago, and now he had got the Victoria Cross, though he could never be coaxed to say what he had done. And he knew—oh, just everything you could *want* to know; and when he coached you in Latin verse, it almost seemed a kind of game. It was quite different from cramming at the Rectory—there it was work all the time.

And now he was going! There'd be only Aunt Grace left, for Greta and Nancy were such kids still that you couldn't count them at all. Living in the country, Roger decided dismally, was quite all right if you'd other chaps to go about with, but if you hadn't it was precious dull.

The train steamed in as they reached the station. Roger was not much interested in the 'friend,' and was quite relieved when there seemed to be no passengers for Riverhead.

"Perhaps he's not coming after all," he said hopefully, but his father hurried forward.

"He'll be in the guard's van," he remarked, smiling at Roger's puzzled face. And when several milk cans and a crate of hens had been bundled on to the platform, a stately St Bernard stepped soberly out and stared inquiringly around him.

"Where am I now?" he seemed to be wondering, as his deep-set eyes saw the hills.

He was certainly the most handsome dog that Roger had ever seen. From his massive head, with its rather short muzzle, to the snow-white tip of his splendid tail, he was a fine specimen of the breed. His tawny orange coat had a snow-white collar, and his nose was jet black, with broad nostrils.

"This is your master, Thor," said the Colonel, waving his hand toward his son. Thor understood. He walked up to Roger and laid his head wistfully on his arm.

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Roger patted it gently. He was much too pleased to say anything at first, and it wasn't until they had crossed the line that he managed to get out "*Oh, Father!*"

"I knew you'd like him," Colonel Denham said, looking almost as pleased as his son did. "He'll be company for you when I'm away, and when you go up to Wellington, he'll look after Aunt Grace and the babies. We'll take off that strap. He's too much of a gentleman to be treated as if he were a prisoner."

They stopped at a cottage to get him a bowl of water; Thor drank deeply, and when he had finished thanked his hostess by a wag of his plummy tail.

"I ought to have got him some at the station," the Colonel remarked. "Dogs suffer greatly from thirst on long journeys, and though people are sometimes ready enough to feed them, they don't always remember this. Thor has come all the way from Chamonix. Jack Lester, who has been looking out for a young St Bernard for me for some time, says he's the pride of the valley. Before he was full grown he rescued a guide who'd been buried alive for several hours. When we come to the common you shall read what Lester says, and Thor can stretch his legs for a bit. He's well trained. See how close he keeps to heel."

The gorse was still in bloom, though the upland heights, to which Thor's eyes so often turned, were purple with miles of heather. A flock of sheep browsed by the stream that wound its way down to the village; Thor did not bark, much less go after them, though he pricked his ears and watched them. But when presently Colonel Denham said quietly, "Off!" he made a sudden dart for the hills, and was out of sight in a moment.

"He'll come back of his own accord by and by—you need not look anxious, Roger. If we want to go on before he returns,

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you've only to whistle; he's sure to hear you, for his ears are remarkably keen. What about that guide? Here's Jack Lester's letter. You can see what he says for yourself."

"I hope you'll be pleased with my choice," read Roger, beginning where his father's finger pointed. "Thor's sire is Champion Junior, and from what I hear, this youngster is every bit as good. A guide was missing last autumn, they tell me, and his friends gave him up for lost. Thor was handed one of his boots to sniff, and sent off to search for him as a forlorn hope. The snow must have covered up his trail completely; but somehow or other Thor tracked him out; he had fallen down a deep gorge. Back he went at top speed to the rescue-party, and led them straight to the spot. The guide was dug out—unconscious, but still breathing. He certainly owes his life to Thor."

"And now Thor belongs to *me*!" said Roger. "I'd rather have a dog than—than anything. And I'm glad he's a St Bernard. They're so big and so faithful. I've always liked the look of them."

"Faithful? I should think so! All dogs are that, but St Bernards have more chance to show their mettle than dogs that are bred in cities.

"St Bernards get their name from the famous St Bernard Hospice in the High Alps, where for hundreds of years, since the hospice was built, the dogs have been bred by the monks. It is thought that at first they may have been kept as a protection against the robber bands who broke into monasteries to steal their treasure; there's a story told of 'twenty-four villains' who raided one on the borders of Switzerland, demanding to be taken to the wealth they fancied was stored away.

"'We will show you what we have, if you insist,' said an old monk meekly, and led them to the hall where the huge dogs

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were kept. I don't suppose those robbers lived to rob again; they brought their fate on themselves.

"Part of the St Bernard's duty to-day is to guide travellers to the hospice. The last five miles of the path from the Swiss side run through a deep and rugged gorge, winding and twisting this way and that over hidden torrents. The snow covers everything, and the monks themselves cannot tell where to tread in safety. But those wonderful dogs never make a mistake; and every winter morning a St Bernard and a monk leave the hospice to bring back the belated travellers who have had to spend the night at a wooden refuge put up in the valley below.

"After each fresh fall of snow the dogs are sent out to search the passes that lead from Italy and Switzerland. Small baskets containing food and wine are fastened beneath their shaggy throats, and they run up and down among the desolate whiteness till they scent out some victim of the storm. Then, if he is not too deeply buried, they scratch away the snow that binds him down, and lick his face with their warm tongues till they bring him back to life again. If he should be too weak to walk, the strongest of the dogs will carry him.

"The old ones teach the youngsters what to do by taking them with them when they fetch the travellers from the valley, but a great deal they know by instinct. A St Bernard puppy, born in London and never out of England for an hour, amused his owners immensely by the way he followed footprints in the snow during a severe winter. He went on the trail with his nose to the ground as his parents would have done in their native land; but he took no notice of footprints on mud or sand.

"Often for many months at a time the hospice is cut off from the rest of the world by great drifts of snow that lie banked up all round it; and if the monks did not lay in large stores of food

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they would not only have none for themselves, but could no longer help fainting travellers. So before the storm winds begin to rage on the approach of winter, they send out small parties to the different villages where provisions are to be had.

“ One October a good many years ago three monks went across the mountains to Aosta, where there are vineyards and fruitful gardens clustering round the quaint old town. When they had bought the provisions they needed, they made for home as quickly as they could, for storm clouds were gathering overhead. While the monks were still some miles from the hospice, the wind, which was blowing straight from the north, set in motion some snow that capped a high peak; over it toppled, and, rolling down the slopes, fell on the hurrying monks in the valley, completely burying them beneath it.

“ In the hospice the great dogs lay stretched out full length, but with one eye open even as they dozed, for they felt there was trouble coming. Suddenly Barry, one of the old ones, sprang to his feet, barking and whining in such excitement that no one knew what to make of him.

“ ‘ Quiet, old dog! What ails you? ’ the brothers cried. But Barry, who had never behaved like this before, heeded neither petting nor scolding.

“ ‘ He knows more than we do, ’ said a dim-eyed monk who was wiser than the rest; and fastening a little barrel under Barry’s neck, he drew back the heavy bolts of the door that led out on to the mountain pass.

“ Barry wasted no time. In some strange way he seemed to know not only that there had been an avalanche, but exactly where it had fallen. He did not turn either to right or left, but bounded on over the crisp white snow until he came to the very spot where the monks had been buried beneath it.



BARRY WASTED NO TIME

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“ One had just managed to dig himself out, and was helping the others, who were farther in, when up came Barry with the wine, which gave him fresh strength and courage. When all were safe, Barry jumped round them, wagging his tail to show his delight, and then he led them through the darkness of the storm safe home to the shelter of the hospice.”

Roger drew a long breath. “ What a grand dog!” he said. “ And to think I’ve one like him, of my very own! Thor may be his great-great-grandson!”

“ I’m not going to tell you to take good care of him, for I know that you will do that. But don’t forget that you stand to him as protector as well as friend, and that if you fail him he’ll have no one else. Blake is building him a kennel—I’ve drawn him out a plan, and you’ll see that he keeps to this. Until then he must sleep in the stable. Big dogs like St Bernards want plenty of room—it is barbarous to cramp them up. The kennel must be several inches off the ground, or he’ll suffer from cramp and rheumatism. Wash the kennel out once a month with some disinfectant to clear it of insect pests, and every week put in plenty of soft clean straw. You must see to this too yourself. And if Thor’s coat is to be kept in good condition you must groom it regularly every morning. I have ordered a dog-brush and comb from the Stores, and a hand-glove of chamois leather which you should use afterwards to give his coat a nice gloss.

“ As to feeding him, it is the greatest mistake to imagine that dogs don’t need meat. It’s their natural food, as you’ll see by their teeth; they must have it to keep them in health. Raw flesh is best (never give him lights!), and biscuit-meal and good dog-biscuits. Two full meals a day should be enough for him, and see that his water bowl is kept well filled and always in the same place. Now whistle, Roger. We should be getting on. Put

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your fingers to your lips as the shepherds do. It will make the sound carry much farther."

Roger did as he was told, and very soon the tip of a plummy tail came into view, held high above a clump of bracken. A few seconds more, and Thor was by their side, still very wistful in his looks. While ready to accept this new master's authority, he held himself sadly aloof; he was listening for a voice that did not come, and his deep dark eyes, as they swept the hills, were full of homesick longing.

It was not until Colonel Denham had been gone some time that Thor took Roger to his heart. Roger was desperately lonely, like himself, and one day when Thor found him alone in the summer-house, sitting all hunched up in a corner of the seat on which his father had so often sat beside him, he thrust his nose into his hand.

"It will be *years* before Father comes back!" Roger was thinking miserably. Then he looked up at the gentle touch, to meet Thor's soft eyes, full of sympathy.

"You are unhappy too," they said; and instead of standing mute when Roger stroked his head, he gave a pleased little growl. He even licked the tip of his nose, and when Roger got up and began to whistle he thumped his tail on the ground.

Thor's tail could talk as well as his eyes. What it said now was, "Come for a walk!" So over the heather the two of them raced, Thor leading the way to the hills.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SOME FUNNY PETS

IT was all white with snow outside—banks of it everywhere, on lawns and rose-beds, hiding the roofs of barns and stables, and dressing the tall pines in long straight robes till they looked like giant ghosts gone to sleep. Huge feathery flakes of it dropped from the sky, and there was not even a twitter from Red Robin, the chatterbox who lived in the thick green ivy that grew round the study window.

In the study the firelight danced on the wall, and Bunty and Bunch snoozed peacefully on the hearthrug, one on each side of their master's feet. He would have dozed too, had he been able, for it was just the time he took his forty winks. But to-day this was out of the question, for Arnold sat opposite, and where Arnold was one had to be wide awake.

"Now what would *you* say was the jolliest sort of pet?" asked Arnold seriously. "You see, I can choose as I like, and I want to have something uncommon."

"Why not a lizard?" said Uncle John from the depths of the big arm-chair. "I'm not joking. Some of them are certainly handsome, and they're very easily tamed. A friend of mine had a green one for years. The top of him was the loveliest emerald, the underpart topaz, and his throat sapphire blue. He was about a foot long, and fed on flies and insects generally. I believe at a pinch he would feed on meal-worms, but he wasn't very fond of these.

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"The curious thing about him was his great delight in music. No matter how sound asleep he might be, he would wake at once when my friend played the violin, and keep his eyes fixed on him until he stopped, coming as close to him as possible. Then there's the chameleon, his first cousin, who would live quite comfortably in the conservatory, and get in nobody's way. It would interest you to see how his colour changes to match that of his surroundings. He may be anything from pinkish mauve to brown or green or rich deep purple. This is nature's way of protecting him from his enemies, and unless you knew where to look for him you would not see him. No one can guess how he does it—it's quite a secret of his own.

"He lives on trees when he is at home, basking in the sun for hour after hour with his eyes closed, until he's hungry. Then he darts out a tongue as long as himself—almost—and draws it back with some innocent fly sticking fast to its slimy surface. His tongue is really a hollow tube with a flesh part at the tip; when he doesn't need to use it he folds it up as if it were a telescope."

"He'd be interesting," said Arnold, "but not much company. I say, Uncle John, you are going to sleep!"

"I'm afraid not," Uncle John said sadly. "You don't give a fellow a chance. If you don't like lizards, why not have a meerkat? He's as common as a cat in some parts of Africa. I've often seen one out there."

"What's he like?" asked Arnold.

"Well, he's what you might call a study in grey and black—long, soft, greyish fur with dark bands round his body, black rings round his eyes, and a black-tipped grey tail. You were looking at a meerkat, or suricate, at the Zoo the last time we were there. He was in the Small Cats' House if I remember rightly."

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"So I was! He had a sharp little face and went wild with delight when I gave him chocolate."

"He's one of the few uncommon pets that are easy to keep," Uncle John went on. "As a rule our climate is too much for them, and the poor things suffer and die. Monkeys, for instance—they seldom live long. It is cruel to bring them over, for their lungs are certain to go."

"But meerkats are hardy and friendly and clean; they are also easy to feed. They eat almost anything you like to give them: scraps of meat, insects, and all kinds of fruit, with any odds and ends that may be going. A meerkat ought to have his liberty, and there's no reason why he shouldn't, for he is by no means mischievous. All the same, if you give him a run in the garden you'd better look out that he doesn't burrow in the flower-beds and eat up all your mother's bulbs."

"I *wanted* a monkey," Arnold remarked, "but Mother said just as you do. I'd have a racoon or a mongoose if I could get one. Aunt Jane suggested guinea-pigs!"

"Well, they're not half so stupid as people say," chuckled Uncle John, amused at his scorn. "My own idea is that they're much more intelligent than most people seem to believe. They are affectionate little creatures too, and their young ones are perfectly charming. They are born 'quite finished,' as the small boy said, with plenty of hair and sharp white teeth. At two days' old they begin to nibble oats, and at three weeks are independent of their mother."

"A rabbit-hutch answers admirably for their home, but if you think of keeping them you must make sure that their sleeping-boxes are rat-proof. Otherwise they will soon fall victims to the gentleman with the long slim tail. Cats and dogs are their natural enemies too; before you let them out of the hutch be sure there are none of these about."

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“ It is well to make a wire run for them which can be moved from place to place. In this way they'll keep the lawn neat and trim—a good-sized tennis lawn would need about a dozen—and will require no other green food beyond what they find for themselves. Not only do they eat the dandelion's leaves, but they cut right down to the very roots with their sharp chisel-like teeth. When the dandelions are finished, they go for the plantains and then have a try at the daisies.

“ Barley-meal and middlings, mixed into a very stiff dough with boiling water, are suitable for their morning meal. The evening one should be a feed of oats and bran. If they're kept in a hutch, you must provide green food, and carrots now and then will do no harm.

“ A boy I knew had a guinea-pig who followed him about like a dog. When he sat down to read, the pretty little creature would scratch at his shoes to be picked up and nursed, and was never happy away from him. When Tom was ill he refused to eat, and though at last he was taken to his room, and ate at once from his hand, he was too far gone to recover. It was long before Tom cared to have another pet, and he never found one who was more faithful.”

They talked of many creatures that afternoon, including harmless snakes and baby alligators. In the end Arnold said: “ I think, Uncle John, after all, I'd better have a dog! ”

“ Why, of course! ” barked Bunty and Bunch, frisking round him. “ *We* knew what you wanted all the time! ”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SOME FAMOUS PETS

THE Nipper was fast asleep by the fire, his legs stretched out as far as they would go and his head on one of Stephen's feet. Now and then he snored gently; once he wagged his tail as if he were having pleasant dreams.

When the Nipper and Stephen invaded the study they had to be as quiet as mice. If the Nipper insisted on hunting for rats—though none had ever been known there—or Stephen was tempted to make a remark, the Master of the House put down his pen, rose up, and opened the door. Then a dog and a boy went meekly out. They had broken the rule of silence.

But to-day his pen had been laid aside, and the Master of the House was puffing away contentedly at an old brown pipe. "By and by we'll go for a stroll," he said, and even in his dreams the Nipper heard him. He sat bolt upright at once.

"After tea," the Master of the House amended, and the Nipper lay down again.

"Isn't he cute?" said Stephen proudly. "He knows every word we say."

"It would be rather queer if he didn't, considering how much you talk to him. Dogs were probably the first pets man ever made, and for hundreds of years they have been his companions, and as faithful friends as he could wish to have. The men of the Stone Age shared their spoils with them when they went

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hunting, and when they rested beside their fire, as you and I are doing now, no doubt the dogs crept up to warm themselves. That was probably how it began. Now we couldn't do without them—eh, Nipper? ”

“ It's only people who are a bit queer who don't love animals, *I* think! ” said Stephen.

“ I wouldn't go quite as far as that, ” said his father seriously, “ though I must say that most of our greatest men have had a strong affection for them. Landseer, who painted that lordly stag you called ‘ your ’ picture when you were small, could make them do anything he wished. A royal lady asked him one day how he'd gained so much power over them. ‘ By looking into their hearts, madam, ’ was his reply. And that is the only way.

“ Though he loved horses, and would often romp with them, using ‘ a stick of barley sugar as his whip, ’ I fancy that dogs were his favourites. He had one, a beautiful creature, who watched over him and worshipped his very shadow. If he went on painting when it was time for him to go for his usual walk, the dog would go and fetch his hat, laying this down in front of the easel and whining until Landseer put down his brush and gave himself the change he needed.

“ Darwin's love for animals was just as great, and he had an extraordinary attraction for them. One day, in a wood near his home in Kent, he was watching some baby squirrels at their play, and what did the little creatures do but drop down from the tree and scamper all over him! Their mother made a terrible fuss, calling ‘ Come back! Come back! ’ But her babies were not in the least afraid—they knew quite well he could be trusted.

“ As for dogs, they adored him. This sometimes got him into trouble, for his sisters naturally were not well pleased when their own pets deserted them for him. His cousin's dog would

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creep away from his master at night to get on to Darwin's bed, where he lay, snuggled close against his feet, till morning.

"A rough-coated white fox-terrier named Polly was his own particular pet. She would make him get up half a dozen times an hour if she had a fancy to bark at passers-by from the veranda and the window was shut. He never got out of patience with her, no matter how busy he might be. The way she took him in by pretending to be hungry much amused the rest of the family. If she felt inclined for a taste of something good in between whiles, though already extremely well fed, she would look at him, trembling in every limb, and with a perfectly piteous expression.

"'She is simply famishing!' Darwin would say with concern; and of course she got what she wanted.

"But though she tricked him, she loved him well, and within a day or two of his death she became so ill that she had to be destroyed. Her heart, poor faithful dog, was broken.

"Bismarck's dogs—two great hounds—were terrible creatures. They'd been trained by this man of blood and iron by means of the whip into perfect obedience, but they were more like machines than animals. They never left him whether he walked or rode, and if he got up to speak at some public dinner their huge heads showed, one on either side of him, as though even there he dreaded treachery. Once, at a congress in Berlin, the Russian ambassador happened to lay his arm on his, and the terrible hounds nearly killed him! They flew at Bismarck's wife too, when, as he was choking, she struck him on his back to help him get his breath. Bismarck came round only just in time to see one of them standing on his hind-legs and tearing at her hair. In another moment she would have been down. But I don't suppose that Bismarck minded. He was a strange

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man, and it pleased his vanity to think they were dangerous to all save himself."

"Did anyone ever make a pet of a lion?" asked Stephen.
"I mean a big lion, not a cub."

"Rosa Bonheur did, for one. His name was Nero. He came from West Africa, a huge tawny beast with a splendid head, and big teeth in perfect working order. But with her he was always gentle as a lamb, and extremely affectionate.

"When she had had him for quite a long time, she was obliged to shut up her house, and of course she couldn't take him about with her. So she sent him to the Paris Zoo, thinking that there he would be well cared for.

"Two years later she went to see him. He had lost his sight through inflammation of his eyes, and was stone blind. But when she said 'Nero' he knew her voice, and made such a rush to get to her that he was thrown down and nearly stunned as he dashed against the bars of his cage. His mistress would be separated from him no more, but took him back with her to his old home. The last thing he did before his death was to try to lick one of her hands.

"Sir Montagu Gerard had a tame tiger. He had been captured when very young and brought up in a military camp. Here he played with the men like an amiable big cat, and was quite good friends with the dogs.

"He used to sleep in Sir Montagu's tent, and the robber who stole in at dead of night met with a startling reception. The tiger did not bite him, but threw him on the ground, and kept him there, a helpless prisoner, by sprawling over his body. When morning came the robber was rescued, almost dead from terror, but otherwise quite unhurt. He had had a lucky escape.

"Sir Walter Scott was a great dog-lover; so was Charles

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Dickens. Linda and Turk, two big dogs he had towards the end of his life, will always be famous for the sympathy they showed him when he suddenly fell lame one snowy day when still some three miles from home. He often told how the 'great boisterous creatures' crept up to him gently as if to say, 'What is the matter, dear master?' They kept very close to him all the way home, so subdued and anxious that it was clear they knew that something was wrong.

"You were reading *Barnaby Rudge* the other day. Well, the raven in that was drawn from life—though there were two Grips instead of one. The first raven Dickens had died from eating white paint; but the second was just as original. When he too was tempted to feast on paint and putty, which made him equally ill, he still took an interest in the cooking of the dinner, which he was accustomed to watch from start to finish. Suddenly, however, he turned over on his back, said 'Cuckoo' very solemnly, and was dead.

"The painter-poet Rossetti was extremely fond of animals, but somehow or other none of his pets seemed to turn out really well. A white bull, bought because he had such handsome eyes, tore up his lawn and destroyed his garden before he was given up as a bad job, while the deer and the peacock were almost as disappointing. The deer was so fascinated by the peacock's tail that wherever that poor bird went he followed, and so closely that soon all the gorgeous feathers were trodden out. Rossetti was obliged to part with them both—the peacock made such a frightful noise that the neighbours complained in a body.

"Another queer pet of his was a racoon, a lively creature who got out at night by slithering up the chimney. He then proceeded to enjoy himself, robbing every hen-roost that he could reach, and doing any amount of damage. He was even

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worse than the armadillos, who dug up the flower-beds in the gardens round, ate poisoned food, and vanished for some months, turning up again, quite brisk and hearty, when they had shed their old coats of mail and had grown two spick and span new ones.

“The racoon disappeared too after a while. Rossetti must have been rather pleased, for complaints had been pouring in about him. No sooner was he gone, however, than another trouble began; soft gliding footsteps were heard about the house in the dead of night, and Rossetti's landlady, declaring that it was a ghost, worked herself into a panic. Nobody guessed the cause of her fright till Rossetti wanted some poems of his which were kept at the bottom of a chest.

“They were there all right, but torn into fragments to make a bed for the racoon! He had lived all those weeks a gentleman at large, hunting by night and returning home down the chimney to sleep all day in his hiding-place.

“Frank Buckland's Jacko was quite a celebrity. The love of animals was in that family, for Frank's mother could do anything she liked with them, and his father, the Dean of Westminster, used to carry frogs about with him in his coat pocket, with perhaps a chameleon or some lizards. The Dean's own pet monkey was always present when there was a dinner-party at the Deanery, usually swinging from the gas-bracket above the table, ready to snatch at anything he might fancy on the plates of the guests.

“But this was nothing to Jacko's exploits. There are most amusing stories told of what he did when he went to London and took up his quarters in the kitchen—how he turned boot-black to help the maids, and blacked the boots, inside as well as out, to the natural dismay of the wearers. After this he ‘helped’

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the cook by blackleading the kitchen table, and then, no doubt feeling uncertain of his footing, put himself to bed in the big kitchen kettle, where the water was comfortably warm. He'd been up to so much mischief that he was afraid to stir, but things soon became too hot for him.

"Frank Buckland's white-tailed sea-eagle was more famous still. He was kept at the Deanery, and once made off just at the time there was a meeting in London of the Chartists—people belonging to the working class who demanded all sorts of reforms. The old Duke of Wellington—this was in 1848—was on guard, a riot being feared, and Louis Napoleon, then a refugee in England, was acting as special constable on Westminster Bridge.

"The sight of an eagle on outstretched wings soaring high over Westminster Abbey was taken to be a sign of victory for his cause by Napoleon, because an eagle is the bird of France, and by the Chartists, because to them it was the bird of freedom. Frank Buckland's one thought was how to tempt him home again before anyone brought out a gun.

"So he tied a dead chicken to a peg in the yard, and moved away out of sight. For hours he waited, hoping against hope that the eagle would hover near his old home and catch sight of that tender chicken.

"He did. Before sunset he appeared above the yard, and swooped down to enjoy his supper. Frank Buckland rushed out in the nick of time, and captured him without much difficulty by throwing a shawl over his head.

"You must read about the rest of his pets for yourself—I'll get you his book on natural history for your birthday. You'll find it more interesting than any story-book that you could choose, for Buckland was a genius with animals. Magpies and jackdaws, cats and dogs, guinea-pigs, monkeys, squirrels and marmosets,

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hawks and owls, ferrets, even frogs and toads, were all, at one time or another, his pets. He loved them all, and understood them as few have done before or since."

"I wish you could tell me," remarked Stephen earnestly, "where I could get a racoon."

But the Master of the House said: "Not if I know it!" and the Nipper got up and left the room.

